“Proof of Purchase”:
Navigating the Montreal Fashion Scene Muslim Style

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ABSTRACT

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Representations of Muslim women in Western media tend to deploy Orientalist elements portraying them as oppressed, backwards, and in need of saving. These images establish Muslim women as unfashionable, identical to one another, and without personality. However, at times, these representations are compensated with depictions of assimilated or "good" Muslim women in which they are portrayed as fashionable, sexual, and palatable to Western sensibilities and expectations. These portrayals have been maintained and reinforced through governmental policies, popular culture, and consumerism. However, these two dominant frames leave little room for any nuanced understanding of Muslim women themselves.

This dissertation explores the lived-experiences of dress and shopping practices of Muslim women in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Through interviews and fieldwork, I focus on the meaning-making and negotiations that Muslim women make in their consumption of media, their interpretations and development of their own religious practices, their navigation of the consumer sphere, as consumers as well as an entrepreneur, and finally of the place of Islam in relation to fashion. In this context, I explore the Muslim women's relationship to Islam and fashion. To see fashion and Islam as oppositional and contradictory is to ignore the complex ways in which Muslim women incorporate and synthesize concepts to balance their own interpretations of what fashion means in their own lives.

This thesis demonstrates the myriad and complex ways in which Muslim women create definitions of fashion that are compatible with their own interpretations of culture, Islam, modesty, and practice. Their definitions of Islam and fashion are constantly renegotiated, reworked, and renewed throughout the course of their lives. Adherence to fashion, then, does not necessarily mean assimilating to the West and rejecting Islam, but rather, can be interpreted as a means that Muslim women use to create their own way of representing themselves without succumbing to the binary of appearing either as liberated or oppressed.

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"Proof of Purchase" is a personal project for me. It has been in the works my entire life, which initially foolishly had me believe that it would come together much easier than it did. Throughout this process, I am appreciative of all the help I received from several significant others. This dissertation is dedicated to the next generation of Muslim women.

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Introduction:
The First Stitch

"*You'll be proud to walk five steps behind your husband*
in this ensemble that screams 'Islamofashion.'"
-Bill Maher

One day while perusing the Internet, I came across a blog story about Bill Maher and a sketch he included in both a comedy special entitled *But I'm Not Wrong* (Oneeyedman21, 2011), and his late night show, *Real Time with Bill Maher* (stopislamstarthumanity, 2009).[1] Both sketches, which can be found on Youtube.com, follow the same formula and attempt to make the same point: the idea that there is a comic contradiction between Muslim women and being fashionable. Both sketches include a fashion show in which Bill Maher is the announcer and the models are all Muslim women dressed in black abayas.

Each sketch opens with a fashion show which highlights the humorous juxtaposition of the fashion show as typically a Western phenomenon that is contrary to Islam, a point made evident in Bill Maher's description of the designs as revealed in the following excerpts:

> There are a few signs that things might be getting better. I read in the paper the other day that, for the first time, Saudi Arabia had a fashion show. Their top designer, Muslim Dior [audience laughter], is on a world tour with his spring line and they just happen to be in Raleigh, North Carolina tonight. And I asked some of the models if they would come over. Would you like to see the [audience cheers], you would, you wanna see the Muslim Dior fashion show? Okay. (From *But I'm Not Wrong*, Oneeyedman21, 2011)

From *Real Time with Bill Maher*:

> You're in for a treat. We've been chosen here at *Real Time* to host the Fifth Annual Fall Fundamentalist Fashion Show [audience

[1] "Oneeyedman21" and "stopislamstarthumanity" are the names of the Youtube channels where I found the videos.

> laughter], and you are gonna love this, can we have our first model, please? (stopislamstarthumanity, 2009)

The audience's laughter (track or otherwise) indicates the source of the humour – the contradiction between Islam and the world fashion, the latter which is indelibly associated with the West.

Alenka Zupančič (2008) has written about the role of the Other in comedy, and how such a presence, even one that seems to displace power dynamics, can in many ways actually reinforce them. She states that this is a "frequent criticism according to which this kind of comedy is basically conservative, that it turns the world order upside-down only in order ultimately to reestablish it in its full force, with no cracks to speak of" (p. 90). In both of Maher's sketches, the role of the Muslim models is not to see Muslim women in a new light, or to challenge dominant stereotypes, but to other Muslim women. If fashion is meant to represent progress, liberation, and Westernization, then the thought of fashion emerging in areas of the world dominated by Islam needs to be recast in a way that situates it back in the stereotypical representation of that world. In her analysis, Zupančič focuses on how the Other operates in comedy proper suggesting that, in a sketch like Maher's, it is not that Muslim women are simply failing at being models that is humorous, but "that *funny things happen* because the Other is not up to its task" (p. 91, emphasis in original). In Maher's sketches, the Muslim women are not up to the task; therefore, a false, ridiculous, off-brand fashion show occurs. The Otherness's inability to be part of the world of Western fashion, and the ridiculousness of their presence on the catwalk, is highlighted through Maher's name for the shows, his description of the "fashions," the actual clothing the Muslim women are modeling, and how they model them.

Figure 1: Real Time with Bill Maher, screenshot. Reprinted according to fair dealing clause (Copyright Act, Section 29.1).

More specifically, the dissonance between the concepts of Islam and fashion is introduced immediately in the play on the designer's name. Instead of Christian Dior, the name of an actual famous fashion label, Maher changes the name to Muslim Dior. The audience's

laughter at the altered name indicates humourous juxtaposition of two concepts, fashion and Islam, that do not normally seem to connect. In the second sketch, identifying the fashion show as a Fundamentalist Fashion Show initiates laughter because it connects the common understanding of Muslims, as fundamentalists, with something Muslims are not commonly connected with, fashion. In both instances, fashion and Islam are constructed in opposition to one another.

In both sketches, Maher acts as an announcer for the fashion show as each model walks out in an identical black abaya with her face covered. Every single 'Muslim' woman is dressed the exact same way, implying that every Muslim woman is a replica. To the delight of the audience, Maher's jokes speak to the incompatibility of Islam and fashion, and effectively, the incompatibility of Islam with modernity. For example, while Maher frames the concept of a fashion show as a possible sign of advancement, what follows in the sketch is a representation of Islam and Muslim women as backwards and oppressed.

Some of Maher's descriptions of the so-called Muslim fashions include the following:

> Sleek and stylish in this wool blend, Najiba is hot, hot, hot, and not just from wearing a suffocating tarp in the desert. It's a look that screams, "Look out, world, I'm a woman of the twelfth century" [audience laughter]. Turn heads without losing yours in this sizzling Saudi sheath and be the wife that he calls for tonight…and every night. (Oneeyedman21, 2011; stopislamstarthumanity, 2009)

From *But I'm Not Wrong*:

> Here's lovely Neema in a coquettish little outfit that showcases the girl inside the woman inside the stifling female containment unit. It's first-class clothing for second-class citizens. And it shows off your curves in all the right places: the top of your head, your shoulders, and absolutely nowhere else. Dress it up for morning prayers or dress it down for midnight stonings. This one says, "My mullah brings all the boys to the yard." (Oneeyedman21, 2011)

From *Real Time with Bill Maher*:

> Here's lovely Gamal in a first look from Saudi Arabia's hottest designer, Muslim Dior. He used to be Christian Dior, but he converted. You'll be proud to walk five steps behind your husband [audience laughter] in this ensemble that screams Islamo-fashion. By the way, Gamal is the winner of Saudi Arabia's Next Top

Figure 2: But I'm Not Wrong, screenshot. Reprinted according to fair dealing clause (Copyright Act, Section 29.1).

Model and I think you can see why. (stopislamstarthumanity, 2009)

After completing a few Internet searches, I realized that Maher's sketches had been covered on websites and blogs (Peterson, 2010; Yusra, 2010). Latoya Peterson, of the feminist blog *Jezebel*, calls the fashion show sketch "one huge Orientalist mass of fail" (para. 2) and Yusra of the Muslim feminist-driven blog, *Muslimah Media Watch,* comments that Maher's jokes can be funny, "but he fails to make you think outside the box, and his jokes only serve to reinforce stereotypes about Muslim women as anonymous beings in black" (para. 13). Both Peterson and Yusra comment that in the *But I'm Not Wrong* sketch, the abayas are short and you can see the women's legs. Not only that, the women are also barefoot, which Yusra argues "implies a lack of civilization or the idea that Muslim women are not *au courant* enough to own a pair of high heels" (para. 4, emphasis in original). The fashion show formula reinforces the Otherness of Muslim women, while the idea that Islam can be modern is presented as ridiculous.

Maher's fashion show incorporates many key concepts that are relevant to my study and important to investigate in greater detail. Who are *the* Muslim women Maher uses in the show? What is Islamic dress? What is Western dress? Why is fashion supposed to be a sign of advancement? Why is the idea of fashionable Muslim women a successful premise for a joke? Seeing Islam, fashion, and Muslim women represented in the media, as they were in Maher's fashion show, inspired this study. The purpose of this research is to problematize these representations and subsequently investigate how fashion and consumption are understood and identified by Muslim women living in Montreal.

Who is *the* Muslim woman in Maher's show?

Maher's sketch illustrates several common stereotypes about Muslim women. Both sketches firmly establish an East vs. West dynamic that is as oppositional as it is contradictory. This dynamic, best explained by Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, demonstrates how "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1994, p. 1-2). Situated within this dynamic is the Muslim woman. The Muslim woman is a figure, almost a myth at this point, in popular culture and history, who has served

many purposes. I write "the" Muslim woman intentionally to reflect miriam cooke's critical notion of "Muslimwoman," in which she connects the words "Muslim" and "woman" to demonstrate how "these two words are used together to evoke or describe a singular identification," and that this "identification is all-encompassing; it erases individual identity and differences" (2007, p. 140). Maher's uncritical embrace of this concept Muslimwoman and its application to the fashion show demonstrates, that in his view, all Muslim women are not only identical, but also identity-less, submissive, and oppressed. This same representation has been extensively employed in popular media. In his comprehensive review of Arabs in film, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Jack G. Shaheen (2001) identifies common portrayals of Arab women, depictions that apply to Muslim women as well. One dominant way Muslim women are represented is as "shapeless Bundles of Black" (p. 22). These "Bundles of Black," the same bundles featured in Maher's fashion shows, communicate an entire history and ideology about Muslim women as inherently Othered. Clothing is the primary, if not sole, indicator of this difference. Western fashion shows are promoted as about expressing oneself through fashion, while the representation of Muslim women and modest dress are not.

Maher's Muslim woman, however, fits into one of two main categories in which Muslim women have long been defined as Other. In the category Maher employs, Muslim women are represented as oppressed prisoners of their own cultures, submissive to violent, barbaric men (Jiwani, 2009). Jasmin Zine (2009) refers to this as "death by culture," which refers to how culture and religion become the reasons Muslim women suffer (p. 154). In the second category, Muslim women are depicted as sexualized, exotic, and dangerous (Jiwani, 1992). While seemingly contradictory, these stereotypes operate to "serve the West's own needs" (Jiwani, 2005, p. 189), and both stereotypes can even operate in a single representation depending on those needs. In the former category, the category Maher favours in his sketches, Muslim women's oppression is represented through the headscarf. The headscarf has become a prevailing means through which the dominant Western media create a divide between the forward-thinking West and the backward-looking East. Muslim women wearing the headscarf have long served, and continue to serve, this narrative. Furthermore, debates around banning the headscarf have appeared in many countries around the world continuing the image of the Muslim woman as a prisoner in need of Western liberation.

Headscarf Debates

As many scholars have noted, the headscarf has become a major symbol of the Muslim woman, and has been widely analyzed in academic literature (Fanon, 1965; Ahmed, 1992; El Guindi, 1999; Yeğenoğlu, 1999; Haddad, 2007; Scott, 2007). These scholars focus on how veiling, unveiling, and reveiling of women has operated in several political contexts, including in colonial Algeria (Fanon, 1965; El Guindi 1999), colonial Egypt (Ahmed, 1992), contemporary France (Scott, 2007), and in the post-9/11 United States (Haddad, 2007). In each of these contexts, the veil serves as a signifier of not only Muslim women, but also of a generalized Muslim culture. In development discourse, unveiling Muslim women operated as a first step to "civilizing" them. However, in many of these historical contexts, the veil began to serve as resistance to the colonizing forces. In contemporary times, studies have documented veiling as a form of resistance. For instance, Haddad's study (2007) of the veiling in the post-9/11 United States refers to it as a response to negative popular discourses about Muslims, and a sign of re-Islamization: She contends "that the process of re-Islamization has been accelerated in the aftermath of 9/11, as an increasing number of adolescents and young adults (daughters of immigrant Muslims) are assuming a public Islamic identity by wearing the *hijab* (headscarf)" (p. 253, italicized in original). The headscarf has occupied a prominent place in discourses around Muslim women in culture as well as academia. The imaginary Muslim woman is always a woman in head to toe black with her hair covered and perhaps even her face, the ultimate "symbol of the 'problem of Islam'" (Scott, 2007, p.21).

Good and Bad Muslim Representations

If the headscarf is the symbol of the "bad" Muslim woman, then the lack of the headscarf and a heightened sexuality serve as an indicator of the "good," assimilated Muslim woman. Here I employ Foucault's notion of "normalization" (1990, 1995) which he defines as "new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus" (1990, p. 89). The norm is then compared to anything that diverges in order "to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them on to another" (Foucault, 1995, p. 184). In this respect, these two discourses of the Othered and assimilated Muslim woman rely on each other

(Jiwani, 2010, p. 79). Jiwani (2010) argues that assimilated and Othered representations are "organized around a doubling discourse" (p. 79). The liberated, assimilated Muslim woman "play[s] the role of a mediating agent, often as a native informant and, at other times, as the foil against which the traditionalism of the abject Muslim woman can be highlighted" (p. 79). Mahmood Mamdani (2004) defines the differences between the "good" and "bad" Muslims as follows: "good Muslims are modern, secular, and Westernized, but bad Muslims are doctrinal, antimodern, and virulent" (p. 24). Similarly, in her article "'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim Citizens," Sunaina Maira (2009) describes the good Muslim as taking part in "Good citizenship" which is predicated on "testifying loyalty to the nation and asserting belief in its democratic ideals" (p. 634). Maira uses the example of Irshad Manji, who became a spokesperson in the United States following the attacks of September 11th, 2001, as symbolizing the "good" Muslim citizen (p. 635). She notes that Manji's "good" characteristics stemmed from her positive representation of the West and how she "claims to preempt terrorism by reforming Islam through economic entrepreneurship and Western-style democracy" (p. 644). What is most interesting about Maira's description of Manji is in regards to her appearance. She states "[Manji] plays the role of a fashionable but fearless warrior, with gelled hair and stylish glasses" (p. 643). Manji's appearance operates as part of her "good" Muslim citizen; her fashionability illustrates her Westernization and her understanding of Western culture.

Commodification

These representations remain relevant and are employed in many aspects of our consumer culture. Maira claims that Manji's "good" Muslim representation does not only operate in the world of the political. As she writes, Manji's "production of the 'moderate' Muslim is both profitable and strategy" (2009, p. 643). This representation serves a deliberate purpose within the consumer sphere. Once the Other enters the consumer sphere, commodification of products operates to appeal to consumers while also maintaining Otherness. Jiwani (2005) argues that many "good" representations aim to make the Other palatable for consumers (p. 189). In the consumer sphere, the purpose is to convince the consumer to purchase a product, not to be frightened of it. Suren Lalvani (1995) also discusses the connection between the Other and the consumer sphere arguing that the sexuality constructed in relation to the Orient "is re-deployed by the market, so that what is a libidinal threat is flirted with at some remove from its source and

reassigned as exotic sign to be borne by Euro-American women in their representation of a commodified sexuality" (p. 282). In this respect, the Oriental sexuality serves as a means to safely experiment with the dangerous mystery of the Orient, but with the ability to leave it at any time. This is similar to Eric King Watts and Mark P. Orbe's (2009) discussion of "spectacular consumption," in which they discuss the commodification of "authentic" African-American culture. They cite bell hooks in their argument, saying that while white individuals will consume what is constructed as "authentic" blackness, they "do not want to *become* black (1992)" (p. 261, emphasis in original). Members of the dominant population can enjoy consuming Otherness at a safe distance.

This attempt to bring the Other within a safe distance is most evident in the sphere of advertising where the ads convey an appeal to multiculturalism. For example, in their study of Asian-American women in advertisements, Minjeong Kim and Angie Y. Chung (2005) found that even when Asian-American women appear in advertisements, the advertisements still manage to uphold "[w]hite male supremacy through the visual consumption of Asian/American women's bodies" (p. 88). Even in an attempt to be inclusive Kim and Chung demonstrate that a power structure can still be present. The Other is included only to be highlighted as different and their position reinforced as belonging outside the realm of the norm.

Creating a safe distance between the norm and the Other is also explored in the work of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994). They analyze how travelers constructed and controlled the image of the East (pp. 162-163), and discuss how the harem, a location travelers were never able to enter, was represented through Western art works for visual consumption (p. 163). This same representation of the harem found its way into Hollywood films (p. 164). As Leila Ahmed (1982) writes,

> What recurs in Western men's accounts of the harem is prurient speculation, often taking the form of downright assertion, about women's sexual relations with each other within the harem. Yet, however confident their statements, Western men had in fact no conceivable means of access to harems. (p. 524).

The harem, and by extension Muslim women, were produced and reproduced through an image of the Orient that responded to the West's needs. The unattainable Muslim woman is rendered attainable through these representations, but in a way that is solely determined through a Western perspective. Even when the Other is included in popular culture, art, and advertisements,

inclusion does not necessarily denote normalization, as power structures, stereotypes, and Otherness can still leach through to maintain relations of power and hegemonic values.

This same commodification of the Other also operates in the marketing of clothing. In the introduction to their edited collection *Re-Orienting Fashion*, Carla Jones and Ann Marie Leshkowich (2003) focus on the popularization of Asian-styled clothing in the West. They argue that their anthology problematizes this popularization, emphasizing that "the processes through which Asian dress has been globalized and celebrated within and outside Asia are so profoundly Orientalizing and feminizing" (p. 5). They suggest that dress styles and practices from Asia are "reworked through processes that might be called 'homogenized heterogeneity': their differences are identified, assessed, and appropriated, purportedly with the goal of deciding where Asian dress fits into the global pantheon of clothing configurations" (p. 5). They argue that though these styles and fashions can be incorporated into the Western fashion market, they nonetheless still remain Othered.

Jones and Leshkowich also speak to why the concept of Islamic fashion seems contradictory. They argue that during colonial interactions,

> differences in appearance and clothing were often read by the colonizers as indexes of deeper differences, even as the colonizers' discursive categories created the reality they supposedly described. [These] concern[s] with matters of culture, and by extension matters of appearance and dress, served to cement apparently natural differences between colonizer and colonized" (p. 9).

This is relevant in how dress practices, especially in a Western versus Eastern context, are loaded with discourses that presume that clothing communicate inherent differences.

However, it is important to note that even Muslim brand designers encounter difficulties in how to represent Muslim identities. Marketing identities, specifically marginalized identities, can be a minefield as representations are constantly being influenced by popular discourses. Reina Lewis (2010) comments that, "The question of what Muslim looks like, or what looks Muslim, brings to the fore many of the issues of collective and individual identity that underpin the very project of formulating a commercial version of Muslim lifestyle culture" (p.59). Here, Lewis is discussing the process of marketing a Muslim lifestyle by Muslims and the difficulty that comes with deciding on the suitability of that representation. This literature demonstrates that the concept of "the" Muslim woman Maher has so easily simplified in his fashion shows, is

actually a complex construction that is influenced by history, power structures, colonialism, and even internal struggles within the Muslim community. While there are many dominant stereotypes about Muslim women, even when Muslims are attempting to change these stereotypes they are encountering their own questions about what it means to be a Muslim woman, and furthermore, the relation of clothing as an expression of that identity.

Rihanna Mosque Fashion Show

Jones and Leshkowich (2003) use the example of when Princess Diana wore a salwar kameez, a South Asian dress, and how this popularized the style in the West. They argue that by Princess Diana wearing a style of dress that South Asian women wear, the dress suddenly became fashionable (p. 20). They contend, however, that the popularity of the style cannot only be linked to the popularity of Princess Diana, but that "it made sense in a comfortable Orientalist logic" (p.20). The salwar kameez could not become fashionable by simply being worn by South Asian women; rather, it had to be "interpreted through Orientalizing logic as a kind of enlightenment, a consciousness about the value of their garment that could only come from the Western fashion establishment telling them what was precious in their cultural heritage and what was not" (p. 20). These style differences between the colonizer and the colonized speak to larger perceived differences of culture that can only cross boundaries if and when the colonizer grants legitimacy to the colonized's traditions.

Figure 3: Rihanna's Islamic Fashion from Jezebel.com. Reprinted according to fair dealing clause (Copyright Act, Section 29.1).

A similar recent example of Islamic dress is when pop singer Rihanna recently posted pictures of herself in the courtyard of the Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on her Instagram account. She was wearing a purple jumpsuit that covered her hair and a gold necklace. Coverage of the incident took place in October 2013, and many articles referenced Rihanna's clothing. A few of these headlines are as follows:

> "Rihanna in another outrage: And this time she's fully clothed… at UAE's Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque" from *The Independent* (Williams, 2013).
>
> "What's fueling the rise of burqa swag?" from *CBC radio* (What's fueling the ride of burqa swag, 2013).
>
> "These Are the Pictures That Got Rihanna Kicked Out of a Mosque" from *Jezebel* (Stewart, 2013).
>
> "Rihanna, Lady Gaga and what's really behind burqa swag" from *The Guardian* (Mahdawi, 2013).

In her article for *The Guardian* pertaining to this issue, Arwa Mahdawi (2013) discusses the concept of "burqa swag" as constitutive of "attempts by western popular culture to eroticise the veil" (para. 3). She suggests that when pop stars dress in the burqa or when advertisements use the burqa, it is an attempt to exploit the "glamour associated with the pariah status" and that dressing like a Muslim woman allows for "a kind of transgression by proxy for the savvy star" (para. 6). Reina Lewis (1999) discusses the process of dressing like the Other with the example of Grace Ellison, a British woman who visited Turkey in the early twentieth century. Described as a "British feminist and Turkophile" (p.501), Lewis analyzes how Ellison writes about her experience dressing like a Turkish woman and the responses she received. She notes that Ellison's "delight in receiving the attention directed (in Turkish) at a supposed Turkish woman indicates her investment in the thrill of passing as 'other'" (p.505). Lewis describes how Ellison enjoys, and finds pleasure, in how she "hoodwinks" (p. 511) Turkish people into believing she is Turkish. It is this "thrill of passing" that resonates with the transgression that Mahdawi describes above – the idea of treading into forbidden territory but in a way that is suggestive of the privilege that one can do so without invoking punishment.

In Rihanna's case, there was a commentator in one of the stories who said that Rihanna was making a statement by showing explicit support of the hijab in the photos; however, such an analysis ignores the way in which Rihanna is Othering the East. Rihanna is known for being sensationalist in her photographs on Twitter and Instagram. This photograph was also sensationalist because Rihanna, as a Western, liberated, pop singer, is not *supposed* to be dressed in this manner. It is clear, due to Rihanna's history, that she is outside of herself and seems to have "gone native" in a chic way. Lewis states that, in the case of Ellison (1999), "cross-

dressing offers both pleasures of consumption—the Orient is a space full of enticing goods to be bought, savoured and worn—and the deeper thrill of passing as native" (p.509). Most importantly, "burqa swag" is only fashionable or chic when worn by non-Muslim women, not Muslim women who wear it out of a sense of religious conviction. When a Muslim woman wears "burqa swag," it is considered oppressive. It would not even be called "swag," it would just be identified as a burqa. Therefore, in Maher's sketches, Muslim women are oppressed through their lack of fashion, whereas Rihanna's appropriation of something that resembles Islamic fashion is seen as edgy, chic, and fashionable. However, Mahdawi (2013) makes an important point about the appropriation of dangerous fashion by non-members of the community: "Appropriate too effectively, of course, and all the danger is gone…and with it the allure" (para. 8). Appropriation and commodification of Otherness operate to make the danger palatable, but could possibly also eliminate it, thereby making it no longer worthy of purchase. A commodity no longer worth purchasing is out of fashion.

Maher's fashion show, the figure of Irshad Manji as a 'good' Muslim, and Rihanna's "burqa swag," raise important themes in terms of the convergence of fashion and Islam. I explore these themes in this thesis paying particular attention to Muslim women and their use of fashion in a Canadian context.

Proof of Purchase

My previous research has focused on the representation of Muslim women and fashion in popular culture (2014; 2013; 2012). It was the representations that I examined, such as those deployed in the Bill Maher sketch that I described earlier, that prompted me to investigate the relation between Islam and fashion in the lived experiences of Muslim women. As a Muslim woman, the thought that fashion is antithetical to Islam seems to neglect the many facets and personalities of Muslim women. Instead of only analyzing the media representations, I wanted to focus on how Muslim women respond to these representations and if they alter their clothing in relation to one, or many of these representations. I wanted to know what kinds of experiences other Muslim women go through in their daily lives. Where do they shop? How do they make fashion work? While there have been numerous studies on Islamic fashion, this study focuses on the dynamic within the Montreal context.

When I examined the representations of the "good" Muslim women who demonstrated their modernity through fashion, I argued that their fashion practices and consumption were construed as signs of their assimilation and their rejection of Islam, proof that these women had bought into Western culture. That is why I chose "Proof of Purchase" as the title to indicate my point of departure for this dissertation. Could the relationship between fashion and Islam really be as simplistic as these representations suggest? To undertake these questions, I decided that interviews and fieldwork would provide an opportunity to hear what Muslim women think of their own experiences. More specifically, my questions are focused on Muslim women's lived realities in relation to fashion consumption in Montreal– a cosmopolitan and vibrant metropolis that sports a unique culture.

Montreal, Quebec Context

My decision to situate my research in Montreal is predicated on several reasons. First of all, Montreal is an important location because of the presence of a growing Muslim community. According to Statistics Canada's 2011 Census, the total Muslim population in Montreal is 221,040, that includes 104,545 women. While 60,040 Muslims in Montreal are non-immigrants, the Montreal Muslim population is also largely an immigrant community, as 151,200 Muslims are immigrants to Montreal. The largest population of immigrants in Montreal comes from Algeria (38,510), with Morocco coming in with the second largest number (35,230). The largest ethnic background of the Muslim population, which is described in the Statistics Canada census description as "visible minority," is Arab at 115,510 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

My interest in this demographic information is in understanding how the respondents' immigrant and ethnic backgrounds, age and other factors pertaining to their social location influence their consumption practices. Furthermore, the presence of a high number of Muslims from all different backgrounds in Montreal illustrates how this city serves as an important cultural landscape in understanding Muslim women and their everyday navigations.

Reasonable Accommodation

In the recently published *Survey of Muslims in Canada 2016* (2016), which was spearheaded by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, the province of Quebec was mentioned specifically for the poor treatment of Muslims (p. 5). Alan Wong (2013) argues that while Montreal is an incredibly diverse city, "there are also tensions that often mark social

relations … revealing that it has a dark side, as well" (p. 123). He refers specifically to the moral panic that was generated at the time of the government appointed panel on "Reasonable Accommodation" which convened public hearings around the province. In their report, the commissioners Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor found that the debate over cultural accommodation was inflated by the media (Sharify-Funk, 2010, p. 438) and that Muslims were overly identified as demanding such accommodations including:

> the wearing of the *hijab*; creation of prayer rooms; fear of Islamist terrorism; co-education/swimming lessons; *halal* food/sugarhouse incident; incidents of Islamophobia; Ramadan; veiled voters; controversy surrounding Imam Said Jaziri; Islamic courts and *sharia*; exemption from music class; handling of the Qu'ran; direction of hospital beds; withdrawal from sex education classes; exemption from school dances; fratricide; pre-natal courses. (Sharify-Funk, 2010, p. 440, italics in original)

Wong (2013) outlines the debate that occurred over Muslim women wearing face coverings during Canadian elections and how this generated "angry sentiments that were aroused [and] revealed a not-so-subtle racism permeating Quebec and the larger Canadian society" (p. 152). In the recent past, former Premier Jean Charest proposed a law prohibiting Muslim women with face coverings from receiving government services (CBC News, 2010, para. 1), while former Premier Pauline Marois stated during her campaign that she would propose a law banning civil servants from covering their hair (Doughtery, 2012, para. 2). Her Parti Québécois government followed through on this campaign promise by introducing the Charter of Quebec Values in the fall of 2013, which subsequently became known as Bill 60: a Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests. If the bill became law, it would have banned the wearing of ostentatious religious symbols for public sector employees. Among the banned ostentatious signs were hijabs and niqabs (The Québec Charter of Values-Five Propositions, 2013). Most recently, in 2015 the newly elected Quebec Liberal party proposed Bill 62, another attempt to ban the covering of faces by employees working in the public sector as well as individuals receiving government services (Solyom, 2015). This never-ending cycle of proposed legislation in the province of Quebec suggests that the issue of "reasonable accommodation" as a cover continues to stoke the fears of those who believe in the threat of the Muslim Other. These attempts to remove Muslim women from public places are necessary to maintain the constructed

dichotomy of the secularist, forward-thinking Quebec culture (see Wong, 2013) versus the perceived religious and backward nature of Islamic practices. The Charter of Quebec Values, as it was known, generated considerable public opposition from Muslims and those in solidarity against such measures. As a result, the political party that introduced the legislation lost its status and power in the ensuing election, and the bill never became law. Nevertheless, the issue is not dead and likely to resurface in the near future. Interestingly, the survey states that Muslims in Quebec "are surprisingly upbeat" (p. 5). They attribute this optimistic attitude to possibly be a result of "having dodged two recent bullets" (p. 5), namely the PQ party's loss at the provincial level and Harper and the Conservative party's loss at the federal level (p. 5).

Globalization

The local Montreal culture is influenced both by Quebec culture and politics, but also more increasingly by globalization. Therefore, I contend that it is important to understand the Montreal setting as a space between Quebec's notion of laïcité "a model of secularism borrowed from France" (Wong, 2013, p. 154) and what Stuart Hall (1991) refers to as the "new" globalization (p. 20). In the latter, Hall argues that "the nation-state begins to weaken, becoming less convincing and less powerful" and further that "[a] new form of global mass culture" (p. 26-27) also characterizes this new globalization. Hall (1991) argues that the "local" emerges as "a response to globalization" (p. 33). In this context, marginalized communities

> have acquired through struggle, sometimes in very marginalized ways, the means to speak for themselves for the first time. And the discourses of power in our society, the discourses of the dominant regimes, have been certainly threatened by this de-centered cultural empowerment of the marginal and the local. (p. 34)

In Quebec, this threat from the margins is perceived as being directed to Québécois culture. As Cory Blad and Philippe Couton (2009) argue, the policies around Canadian multiculturalism "[were] viewed in Quebec as another attempt to dominate and reduce *Québécois* culture" (p. 659, italics in original). Hence, how Muslims are viewed is integrally tied to the threat they are perceived as posing to Québécois culture. This is one aspect underpinning the moral panic concerning the wearing of the headscarf. What is important in my study is understanding the balance between local Québécois culture and global forces. Roland Robertson (1995) introduced the term "glocalization" as a means of combining and

demonstrating the interlocking and intersecting influences of the local and the global. Robertson's desire to move away from the term globalization rests on its perceived tension between the local and the global (p. 40). He argues that "in the broadest sense, the compression of the world has involved and increasingly involves the creation and the incorporation of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole" (p. 40). He cautions against seeing the global and local as polarities of each other (p. 33) that limit our understanding of "the global as if global excludes the local" (p. 34).

Glocalization is apparent even in the sphere of consumption. In the introduction to the collection *Muslim Societies in the Age of Mass Consumption*, Johanna Pink (2010) claims that "to assume that we are confronted with a one-directional force of homogenization, a process in which a hegemonial Western culture of consumerism is taking over and sweeping away local structures and traditions of consumption" (pp. ix-x) is spurious. Instead she argues for the concept of glocalization, which she describes as "the complex interaction between globalizing and localizing processes" (p. x). Her approach lends itself to a greater appreciation of the ways in which brands are adapted specifically for Muslim consumers. For example, she cites dolls, clothing, and food as symbols "that Muslims [are] increasingly seek[ing] to define and express their distinct identity through the consumption of 'Islamic' commodities" (p. xi). This connection between the local and the global is relevant here as this study is concerned with agency and adaptation, paying particular attention to how Muslim women in Montreal deal with the Montreal market and how they localize products to meet their own values and needs. Globalization is not, then, an all-encompassing force, but a dynamic process in which the mixture of the global and the local interact to create spaces for individuals who do not identify with either.

Hybridity

In its diversity, this Montreal context serves as a worthwhile site to investigate hybridity. Here, I draw upon Marwan M. Kraidy's (2002) approach to diversity as exemplified in his research in Lebanon. For Kraidy, Lebanon serves "as a crossroads civilization, a buffer zone between Christianity and Islam, a point of contact between East and West" (p. 188). Kraidy contends that increasingly cultures are being defined through their hybridity, and that this hybrid space does not act solely as an intermediate space in between the local and the global, "but as a

zone of symbolic ferment where power relations are surreptitiously re-inscribed" (p. 191). Ultimately, hybridity allows for "an enactment [of] identity, as a process which is simultaneously assimilationist and subversive, restrictive and liberating" (p. 205). Kraidy's analysis of Lebanon demonstrates the intricacies of a particular location in which there are a variety of factors that inform an individual's identity. These glocalized identities can be situated along a spectrum between assimilation and resistance, suggesting that there is a level of agency involved. As many Muslim women in Montreal deal with complex hybrid identities, I argue that approaching my field of study from this perspective allows me to address questions and issues relevant to this context.

Figure 5: Mariam as a child, PEI

Locating the Self and the Research Process

Mariam's Background

My interest in this project does not come from an innate interest in, or love of fashion, by any means. Rather, my interest in this project was developed through the difficulty I experienced in finding suitable clothing from around the age of 12. As a Muslim child, I wore short sleeves and shorts, but as I grew up I began to cover more of my body. For example, when I stopped wearing shorts and short-sleeved shirts, and I could not find anything to wear at the stores in my city. The clothing at the stores was too short, too tight, short-sleeved, three-quarter length sleeved (always extremely frustrating), transparent, or just plain old inappropriate for my modesty standards. When I think back to those days, I remember my sister and I trying to figure out how to change the clothes that were available to us to fit our needs. Some of the early tactics we used included stretching tops, wearing men's clothing, and wearing long jackets. I did not particularly like any of these options, but until I figured out something else I did not know what to do. We did not have many Muslim friends our age and this was before the Internet became the place to share ideas the way it is now. Over time our tactics became more sophisticated, but it took practice, sharing ideas, and trying new methods. There was a time in

Figure 4: Mariam as a child, PEI

my life when I hated discussing clothes, not because my desires for modesty and the guidelines that I adhered to were too restrictive, but because I could not find anything to wear that would conform to those guidelines. It was not until we discovered more options that I began to enjoy clothes and creating outfits. Before then, it was simply a point of frustration.

Figure 7: Mariam, Niagara Falls, 2009

Many people from the Muslim community in Prince Edward Island would go to their home country and bring back clothes. Many women would share their imports with each other. I had many "aunties" who were from Pakistan and they would bring me back tops like in Figure 7 below. However, these items would not be enough to sustain an entire wardrobe and they also might not be the exact style or look that a person might be interested in. Once the internet became a site of commerce, women in my community began sharing websites with each other. The options in the Western consumer sphere were not always conducive to the modesty guidelines many Muslim women observed.

Figure 6: Mariam, Montreal, 2010

Native Ethnographer

As a Muslim woman in Montreal I initially felt that I would be in a unique position to understand the complex identities of my participants, and I also assumed that my special knowledge of living this experience would be beneficial to my interviews. I prepared myself to reconcile my position as a member of the population being studied and as an academic performing research. I have a Canadian mother of Scottish-Irish descent who converted to Islam and a Tunisian father who was raised Muslim. I grew up in Prince Edward Island, Canada, and I am a self-described practicing Muslim. I am also a PhD candidate. I employed the same perspective Kraidy (2002) used in his research when he positioned himself as a "native ethnographer," describing himself as "on the borderline between two worldviews: that of the 'native' culture, the culture of intimate, taken for granted, quotidian knowledge, and the worldview of the ethnographic, academic, systematic, and therefore,

instrumental knowledge" (pp. 192-193). This is in line with John C. Reinard's (2008) two approaches to participant observation: the emic and etic approaches. He states that the emic approach "focuses attention on interpreting the study's obtained information from the perspective of a member of the group or culture being studied," while the etic approach concentrates on "the outsider who views the situation with some distance that may place perspective on what is observed" (p. 247). For my research, I applied both of these perspectives as the native ethnographer as I consciously worked to maintain my position between both viewpoints.

Embarking on Interviews

When embarking on my interviews, one of my main goals was to avoid reproducing a dynamic that would Other my participants in the exact way that my work attempts to critique. Even though I am a Muslim woman myself, I was challenged to find a way to interview Muslim women that would not reproduce a power dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee. While it may seem as though shared identity would erase any form of Othering in the interview process, there were still challenges that had to be taken into account in order to avoid reaffirming and projecting hegemonic values onto the interview and participant. I needed to acknowledge that my experience as a Muslim woman did not account for all Muslim women's experiences, and that while many of the practices my participants partook in were familiar to me and were even activities in which I also take part, there were others that were not. How I dealt with these differences influenced the interview. Bearing this in mind, I will outline how I tackled the interviewing process, the decisions I made, how I conducted the interviews, the questions I asked and how I asked them, the ways in which the process was successful, and which parts of the process still require improvement. Finally, this section will discuss the difficulties of keeping these issues in mind throughout the interview while still asking the necessary questions for my research. In total, I interviewed 22 women of diverse backgrounds and life-styles who self-identified as Muslim.

Close Positioning

My close positioning to my participants is in line with recent academic literature on ethnographic methodology. Stephanie Taylor (2002) argues that the researcher "is part of the world being studied and to the ways in which the research process constitutes what it

investigates" (p. 3). In keeping with this, D. Soyini Madison (2012) claims that there is a shift in the ethnographic position from subjectivity to positionality. She argues that "positionality requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or *subjective* selves. Instead, we attend to how our subjectivity *in relation to others* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of others" (p. 10, italics in original). I recognized early on in the interviews that there were many ways in which my positionality, even if I took the position of the native ethnographer, still produced a power dynamic between myself and the participants, and that I may still Other my participants and their responses through our interview. Furthermore, I needed to remember that my experience as a Muslim woman did not serve as a norm against which to compare others.

My Role in the Interview Process

My first step in the interviews was to analyze myself, my role as a researcher, my identity as a Muslim woman, and my connection and relationships with the participants I interviewed. I approached my interviews by asking myself how I could study a group of people with whom I identified without making them feel like objects of study and without making assumptions based on my own experience. I made known to my participants that I am a Muslim at the beginning of each interview. My initial objective in this approach was to change their idea of what it means to be interviewed by someone about Islam. Knowing that many interviews and questions I receive in regards to my Muslim identity can make me defensive and that at times I become a model minority, I hoped that identifying myself as a Muslim would serve to put my participants at ease and indicate to them that I would not be asking the same questions they might receive on a daily basis. During the interviews, I shared my own experiences, to put my participants at ease, and showed I understood.

However, throughout this process I realized that I could not make assumptions about what these Muslim women were discussing based on my own experience. There were many times when I asked follow-up questions to responses that seemed clear and obvious to me, but that I surmised might not be as clear to anyone unfamiliar with Muslim women's experiences in Canada. Furthermore, I did not want to assume I understood what they were saying by relating their answers to my own experience. I had to remind myself that I was not the norm. I also had to remember that I was coming to the interviews with a level of privilege. While I am an Arab, I

am also white; I am a practicing Muslim, but I am not a visible Muslim as I do not wear the headscarf; I have no language barrier as I speak French and English fluently, and I grew up in Canada. This was important to remember, as many of my participants did not have this level of privilege, and I needed to keep in mind the imbalance of power that was part of these interactions.

Furthermore, I had to remember that these interviews were going to be read by non-Muslims, and that part of my role was to make the research comprehensible to academics who may be unfamiliar with Islam. Initially, it was my belief that my personal experience would serve as an asset in creating connections with my respondents and making them comfortable in the interviews, but in practice this balance was difficult to maintain without constant attention to and self-awareness of how I was viewing my participants and how I understood myself. One way in which I was able to move beyond my own experience was through follow-up questions and probing for further exploration of responses that seemed obvious to me. I also tried to be sure to identify the nature of the research, clarifying that I was not necessarily interested in asking these women the same questions as non-Muslims often ask about wearing the headscarf, as for example, if they feel submissive, or whether or not they feel they are Canadian. Instead, I asked questions about their activities, the active aspects of their lives, and decisions they make throughout the day, as well as asking them to create the definitions for certain terms.[2]

Defining Muslim Women?

The major question in my research was deciding what it meant to be a Muslim woman participant in my research project. Who is a Muslim woman, and how do I make a decision that someone "counts" as a Muslim woman, and is thus appropriate for my research? I am reminded of Judith Butler's work in *Frames of War* (2010), in which she discusses how the frame operates to allow some bodies to count by virtue of their inclusion in the frame: "The frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality" (p. xiii). Again, my position as the researcher was vastly unequal to that of the participants. While my research aimed to portray a diversity of voices and experiences and to counter homogenous representations of Muslim

[2] I expand on this in the "Question" section.

women, I was still the one deciding which voices counted, who was allowed in the frame, and what it means to be a Muslim woman in the context of this study.

As I did not want to have to choose who was "Muslim enough" for this study, I decided that the only way to go ahead was to allow the participants to tell me how they identified. When selecting participants, I employed Shahnaz Khan's (2002) method for choosing interviewees for her study. She utilizes the category of "Muslim as a starting point, and through this discussion and [her] own writings problematize[s] it in an attempt to understand the fluidity of cultural expressions, particularly those within diasporic communities" (p. xxii). Khan argues that "[h]ow individual women negotiate the contradictions in their lives suggests a plurality of ways of performing Muslim identity and/or responding to being positioned as Muslim in North America" (p. xx). This felt like the only starting point that was appropriate for my project as well. It also reflected agency on the part of the participants, regardless of how they looked. It was ultimately their decision to identify as a Muslim woman or not and, as became evident through the interviews and their varied answers, they decided what that meant. The participants and I created the frame together, and the criteria for the term "Muslim woman" then took on a multitude of meanings. Through this process the concept of a singular "Muslim woman" was rendered unusable even for selection

Criteria for Participants

Initially, I only had two criteria for my participants: that they self-identified as Muslim, and that they were between the ages of 18-29. However, during my research at N-ti, which will be outlined and analyzed in Chapter Six, I used the same group of questions I used with the other Muslim women I interviewed and decided to include those interviews in this chapter as well. There was no age specified for the N-ti participants. In the end, my age category became 18 years and older. In my research, I did not pay attention to whether or not participants were wearing particular styles of dress, wearing the headscarf, had a particular ethnic background, or were raised in a Muslim family. Rather, my aim was to find Muslim women who identified in different ways, demonstrating the plurality of "Muslimness" that Khan discusses, and to dislodge the idea that Muslim women in Montreal are only immigrant Arabs who wear the abaya.

Finding Participants

I began my search for participants in the summer of 2013 before the Charter of Quebec Values was introduced. Most of my interviews were conducted during this period. The interviews with N-ti store employees took place in November of 2013. Two other interviews were conducted in early 2014. When I was attempting to find interview subjects, I was inspired by the fashion website *The Sartorialist*, where photographer Scott Schuman posts pictures he has taken of people on the street who are dressed in interesting ways.

While I did not create a website featuring Muslim women and their sartorial styles, I did use this method in order to approach participants. I began interviews with Muslim women in Montreal and found participants while walking around the downtown Concordia University campus. I approached Muslim women, explained the project, explained who I was (as both a researcher and a Muslim woman), and asked if they were interested in participating. I approached my participants by saying "salam alaikum"[3] to demonstrate that I was a Muslim woman. I tried to address the "us," to indicate that we belonged to the same community. I hoped that this approach would suggest to the participants that the goal of my interviews was not to twist their words or judge them, but to understand their perspectives and hear their voices. If they were interested but not able to conduct an interview right away, I gave them my card and we made plans for another meeting. My card had my contact information, email address, and website address. However, I recognized that in this process, I was only interviewing Muslim women who appeared visibly Muslim, meaning they were all wearing a headscarf. In some cases, I hoped to use snowball sampling to find Muslim women who made different choices in regards to dress through friendships and relationships with prior participants. I was lucky enough to find participants who do not wear the headscarf through my own personal contacts.

Muslim Women in Montreal Information		
Age	**Cultural Background**	**Occupation**

[3] This means "peace be upon you" in Arabic and is a common greeting in the wider Muslim community.

24 year old	French Canadian and Iraqi	Student
18 year old	Lebanese and Syrian	Student
18 year old	Algerian	Student
19 year old	Haitian	Student
18 year old	Moroccan	Student
18 year old	Algerian	Student
20 year old	Moroccan	Student
27 year old	Saudi Arabian	Student
27 year old	Québécoise	Student
19 year old	Palestinian	Student
27 year old	From Denmark, Yemeni	Student
26 year old	Saudi Arabian	Student
28 year old	Bangladesh and Uzbek	Looking for Work
24 year old	Moroccan	Recent Grad, Freelancer
20 year old	Moroccan	Student
30 year old	From United States, Egyptian and Eastern European	Student
37 year old	Moroccan	Planning to return to studies, looking for a job in her field
39 year old	Québécoise	Working Part-Time
34 year old	Moroccan	Student
22 year old	Tunisian	Student
20 year old	Algerian	Student
42 year old	Indian	Entrepreneur/Owner of N-ti

Figure 8: Participants' Background

Using this process for finding participants as well as combined with the interviews with N-ti employees, I interviewed 22 women of various ethnic backgrounds and lifestyles (see Figure 8). All of my interviews took place in public spaces in agreed-upon locations. Many of the interviews took place in the Engineering, Computer Science and Visual Arts Integrated Complex (EV Building) located in the Concordia University downtown campus. My interviews with N-ti employees took place in the store. Throughout the process of my interviews, the goal was for the participants to feel safe, relaxed, and comfortable enough to express their opinions. I spoke with students, mothers, married women, and women who are single. Some women grew up in Montreal while others had recently moved to Montreal for school or family reasons. For ethical reasons, women who did not wish to remain anonymous are identified by their names, and for others, I have assigned a pseudonym. All of the participants' contributions are italicized.

Identity

> *I don't see it as I'm this comma this comma this comma this, I'm just all of those things at once, you know. I'm not Danish in one*

> *scenario and then Muslim in another scenario. I'm kind of, this is my Muslim identity is part of my Danish identity, is part of my Yemeni identity.* (Yasmin)

The women who participated in my study had complex identities that were not homogenous. My study included a woman who was half-Canadian, half-Arab, another of Yemeni descent who grew up in Denmark and now lives in Montreal, a half-Bangladeshi, half-Uzbek woman who lived in Toronto prior to moving to Montreal, a woman who was half-Egyptian and half-Eastern European, grew up in the United States, and was in Montreal for school, two Québécois women who have converted to Islam, a Haitian woman who had converted to Islam, and women from Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Palestine, Algeria, and Tunisia. These women had different lives and different stories. When asked about their complex and hybrid identities, the women discussed them in terms of the complementarity of the different aspects of their lives.

Many of the Muslim women discussed taking part in activities that were part of western culture as long as they did not conflict with their Islamic ideals. While religion came first, it was not at odds with having fun. Kenza stated:

> *Like our Prophet always had fun, he would always play with his wife, they would always run around, you know, and he would joke and stuff. It's not, when I have to think of, should I have fun or should I stay home and pray, those are not, like, the only two options we have. I do what everybody else does.*

Here the interviewee references the Prophet (PBUH). For Muslims, the behaviour of the Prophet is considered Sunnah which is an example for Muslims to follow. She demonstrates that activities for amusement outside of religion are acceptable because the Prophet would also take part in activities.

Marie, who is a Québécois woman, stated that there were parts of her cultural background in which she no longer participates. For example, she discussed Québécois cuisine and how many dishes include pork, which is *haram* or forbidden in Islam, and that many of her family gatherings include alcohol, which is *haram*, and music. These two participants demonstrated how they negotiate and choose what parts of Quebec culture to take part in and what parts to abstain from. Kenza mentioned watching the television show *The Vampire Diaries* as an acceptable practice in Western culture: "*I take from everything. I take what I can, what I am*

allowed to take. There's some, certain aspects of Western culture that I would not take, like alcohol or clubs and bars and stuff, but those are not, those are not mandatory for one to live a good life." There was no sense that quality of life or enjoyment was lacking due to any religious-based restrictions. These women created boundaries based on their own interpretations of their religion and what they believed to be acceptable.

Wurood who is half-Iraqi and half-Canadian discussed how these two identities are at times difficult to reconcile. She felt that when she is at the mosque she is considered "the white one," and when she is at school or out in the city she is seen as a Muslim or an Arab. Consequently, she does not feel as though she belongs to either group. However, her tactic to deal with not having a sense of belonging is to "surprise people." For example, when she is at work she high-fives people and makes jokes, actions that are unexpected from a Muslim woman, but as she stated "*People expect me to act a certain way and I don't know, I just have fun breaking stereotypes and making 'yo mama' jokes and stuff like that.*" Sorouja, of Uzbek and Bangladeshi background, also spoke positively about her mixed identity, saying that "*you take bits from your dad's side, you take bits from your mom's side, yeah, and you celebrate everything.*" These women were also constructing their own ways of living Muslim identities and deciding what that means for them. Even though they face certain limitations, they decide what those limitations are and thus, are in control of those decisions. Yasmin mentioned that the notion that Muslims living in Western countries are constantly at odds with Western culture ignores the way that Muslims actually practice their religion within those contexts:

> *I can't see Islam as something foreign to my Danish identity, it's part of it. The way atheist Danes or Christian Danes see their religion as located within their locality. I see my own personal, you know, the way I practice Islam is located. I went to a mosque in downtown Copenhagen, I didn't go to a mosque in Yemen, you know.*

For many of the participants in my study, their religious experiences have been shaped and interpreted within a Western context. There were many participants who were born and raised in Muslim-majority countries, and when they came to Montreal they had to decide how to practice their religion in this context. However, unlike the stereotype of Muslim women, these women's identities are not constrained to simply being an Other in Western culture; instead, they combine the two in interesting and hybridized ways.

Interestingly, there were a few participants who were not visibly Muslim, for example, they did not wear the headscarf or appear Arab. Yet, the fact that they constructed their identities in ways that do not immediately identify them as Muslim also leads to its own frustrations. For Muslim women who are not identifiable by their appearance, not being identified as a Muslim woman can also be frustrating, as it is often accompanied by thoughts that they are more "liberated" or more assimilated to the West. Sally described herself as having fair skin and hazel eyes. In this respect, there was an expectation that she would be an apologist to critiques of Islam. She described an encounter with a Muslim colleague who only recently "*realized that I actually cared about the Muslim community and people's impressions of it, and all these things.*" She even felt that the treatment she received from him was different than a colleague who wears the headscarf. Even without looking visibly Muslim, she is still battling stereotypes based on her appearance. She has had to figure out ways to deal with these judgments.

Identity, and especially, Muslim female identity, is not an easy or simplistic term to define for this study. I placed this section on "identity" in the introduction to demonstrate the diversity of the participants in this study and how they are all actively making decisions in regards to how they identify themselves. Culture, religion, and personal interests all play a role in these definitions. Appearance also influences how these Muslim women must navigate and make their values known since even not appearing like a Muslim woman, or what people expect a Muslim woman to look like, can have implications for what even other Muslims expect from an individual.

Interview Process

Semi-Structured Interviews

I utilized the qualitative or semi-structured interview format with my participants. The goal of a semi-structured interview is for the interview to feel more like a conversation (Reinard, 2008, p. 271). This kind of discussion does not attempt to force responses from the respondents; instead, "it involves using indirect methods in ways that are similar to nondirective therapy. The entire process is a combination of an attitude and a set of question strategies" (Reinard, 2008, pp. 271-272), which "permit[s] respondents to move beyond highly detailed questions" (Reinard, 2008, p. 373). I used this interview style as a means of making the questions open-ended enough for the Muslim women to define and explain for themselves their experiences, and to make it

clear that they were not expected to agree or disagree with my assessment of certain topics. By allowing the interview to be relatively unstructured, I was able to move away from my own interpretations and experiences in the field and use each participant's articulations of her experiences as a jumping off point for the rest of the interview.

Interview schedule

While my interviews were semi-structured, I still incorporated an interview schedule (see Appendix 1, 2, and 3) in order to compare responses from a variety of respondents. The interview schedule included my list of questions and the order in which to ask them during the interview. The interview schedule I employed was adaptable and in line with Murchison's (2010, p. 107) guideline that "[a] good interview will evolve with a good conversational flow that allows both the interviewer and the interviewee to become comfortable." The schedule allowed me to touch on issues I found important and engaged the participants in a conversation-style interview. For each interview, I tried to pursue certain ideas and themes participants brought up, even if they deviated from the set questions. Keeping the conversation relatively loosely structured allowed participants to introduce ideas and concepts that I had not previously considered or that were specific to the participant's own life experience, while still maintaining common questions to compare between interviews. The interviews were between 20 minutes to two hours.

Disadvantages to the Semi-Structured Interview

While the semi-structured interview was a beneficial and appropriate for my research, it did have its disadvantages. Packer (2011, p. 48) argues that while the semi-structured interview is meant to mimic a natural conversation, it is not actually a spontaneous conversation; it is scheduled. He observed that the conversation takes place between strangers, a factor that makes this kind of in-depth interview less like a natural conversation. Perhaps most importantly for my research, Packer states that a research interview "is not an interaction between equals" (p. 48). As previously mentioned, an unequal power relation underpins the interview process, even though I used a conversational-style interview and belong to the target population I was interviewing. This was where my concern about Othering Muslim women became relevant, because even when I told a participant that I was a Muslim woman, I was still in charge of the interview and I am still the one asking the questions; our equality was not a given. Furthermore,

even though I had hopes of making the interview feel like a regular conversation between two Muslim women, as Packer states, not acknowledging the constructed nature of the interview camouflages a power dynamic, as I was the one with the microphone.

Packer also critiques the fact that the interview is conducted "for a third party" (p. 48), for review by people who were not part of the initial conversation. He points out that the interviewer does not behave naturally, as "qualitative interviewers are often told they need to adopt a special attitude distinct from that of everyday interaction" (p. 48). The conversation is not about the present situation, but deals with events that have happened or may happen in theory. It does not have "a focus on the here and now" typical of everyday conversations (p. 49). The final point Packer makes is that the interview is about "obtain[ing] accounts or descriptions from an interviewee" (p. 49). Packer's critiques illustrate many points worth bearing in mind when conducting the qualitative or semi-structured interviews. While I made every attempt to conduct my interviews on an even footing with the participants, I was aware of the power relations involved, and while I aimed to have a conversation with my participants and maintain as equal a playing field as possible, the interviews were still highly organized, and had a specific conversation style. While my interviews did not avoid these barriers, I aimed to navigate them and be transparent with the participants.

Questions

Formulating my questions was another way in which I attempted to challenge Orientalist portrayals of Muslim women as being without agency and passive. Part of my study was meant to compare the Montreal context to international studies that have been conducted. Several questions focused on Montreal's political and social context. Secondly, I did not want to ask questions that would reinforce Orientalist ideas about Muslim women, which focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the decision to wear the headscarf. I did not treat the headscarf differently than a shirt or dress; I did not want to exoticize the headscarf or make it seem like the single most important decision a Muslim woman makes in terms of her dress, or even her life. I did not want to reproduce a discourse that I criticize in which the headscarf becomes a symbol of Muslim women and the lack of a headscarf becomes a symbol of liberation and rejection of Islam. The point is that Muslim dress includes many articles: it can include the headscarf, but it does not have to; it can include a dress or an abaya, but it does not *have* to. Finally, I did not use

the term “hijab” in this dissertation to refer to the headscarf, as the term “hijab” means “to cover” in Arabic, and this term is used at length to discuss covering many parts of the body, not just the head.

Further, I did not create different interview questions for women who converted to Islam than women who grew up in Muslim families. If the participant mentioned her upbringings and it was relevant to her story, then it became part of the answers that I transcribed, but I did not ask any specific questions dealing with the process of learning to dress modestly only to women who converted since all of my participants went through their own individual processes. I asked all the participants the same questions; it was up to them to articulate how cultural upbringing, religious teaching, and many other elements, were relevant in their life and dress. What I discovered throughout my interviews is that Muslim women all come to a point in their lives where they begin to make their own decisions and assert their own identity regardless of their upbringing or cultural background. With this in mind, I decided that treating women who converted to Islam differently suggests that women who grew up as Muslims have less agency. It also suggests that converted Muslim women are the only women on a journey regarding their dress, which is not the case, as evidenced by my interviews. It is important to understand dress practices within a larger context of everyday practices and decisions and how religion influences them.

In order not to make assumptions about what it means to be a Muslim woman, I began every interview by asking the participants to define their own terms. For example, some of the questions I asked were: What does it mean to dress modestly to you? What does it mean to you to be religious/practicing, and do you identify with this definition? What does fashion mean to you? In asking these questions, the participants articulated early on how we would define the terms throughout our interview, and many of my questions were then adapted to follow up on how their definitions applied to the rest of the topics and their everyday choices. This definition process allowed the participants to decide the direction of the interview, since they were creating the basis for the subsequent interview questions. My perspective was not meant to serve as a starting point for the interview. This was a way for me as an interviewer to turn the power over to my participants and to dislodge the notion that Muslim women are not capable of making decisions in their own lives. The process also allowed for these definitions to come from different sources and different contexts, demonstrating how Muslim women in Montreal are

bringing information together in order to live a life that is Islamic on their own terms in this context. The process of having the participants create definitions allowed them to articulate the most important terms of this study and enables me to acknowledge and legitimize their voices in the academic world.

Categorizing the Answers

As mentioned above, the questions I formulated were informed by the existing literature, but also emerged from issues prevalent in the Montreal context. I transcribed my interviews and categorized them according to answers to the specific questions. Within those answers, I organized them even further and grouped together similar answers. In the chapters that follow, I include the quotations that best expressed the sentiments I received from my participants as well as paraphrasing other answers that are relevant. However, even here, I was faced with the challenge of parsing out which answers to report verbatim and which ones to paraphrase. I decided to incorporate answers that best represented the majority of the responses, well as those answers that were not in sync with the group so as to highlight the diversity within my interviewees. My goal through the process of categorizing answers was to illustrate the diversity of my participants and their responses.

Website

I had intended to create a fashion blog featuring the participants in my study in which I hoped to feature photographs of the participants who agreed to be part of the website. The inspiration for the website component of my study was the popular fashion website *The Sartorialist*, mentioned earlier, in which Scott Schuman attempts to "creat[e] a two-way dialogue about the world of fashion and its relationship to daily life" (n.d., para 1). The goal for my website was to enhance this two-way dialogue between Muslim women and fashion. I also hoped that it would create a dialogue in which Muslim women could engage with each other and further dislodge Orientalist portrayals about them. Further, the website was meant to serve as an acknowledgement of the Muslim women who took part in my study and demonstrate the diversity of Muslim women as well as the variety of ways in which they utilize clothing. However, most participants were not interested in participating in the website, so this did not pan out as intended. Nonetheless, as in line with the Sartorialist strategy, I still approached Muslim women in the street in order to find participants who were willing to be interviewed.

My blog was also intended to make academic discussions and articles more accessible to my public and thereby foster more of an engagement with the issues. Halavais (2006) argues that blogs "are shaping a new 'third place' for academic discourse, a space for developing the social networks that help drive the more visible institutions of research" (p. 117). In this light, I had hoped that the website would make my research available to those it most concerns: Muslim women and people who may be ignorant about Muslim women. In doing so, my aim was to take my academic research outside of academia and into a forum where discussions and exchanges could occur with those target readers.

Unfortunately, there were many participants who were happy to consent to the study as long as their identities remained confidential. There were also participants who consented to participate in a non-confidential manner, but who were still not comfortable with having their photograph taken. I only recruited three participants who were willing to include their photograph for the website. I then decided to use the website to post written pieces about my project and to write about the Charter of Quebec Values while the debates were occurring. I also used the website to post articles online that focused on Islamic fashion. That being said, the work I meant to accomplish with the website did not come to fruition as expected or desired.

Field work at N-ti

One critical site where I conducted my research was the Muslim clothing store, N-ti. When Dikra Ait Nacere[4] created the store N-ti (N-ti being the Arabic word for the feminine pronoun "you") she said the reason was because she felt "[t]here [was] a lack of casual, practical and everyday clothes for Muslim Canadian women" (Newscop, 2010, para. 2). N-ti began as a store run out of Nacere's basement that later became a stand-alone store (Newscop, 2010, para. 3). The store has earned success resulting in a franchise of stores in Mississauga, Ontario and Malden, Massachusetts. I conducted my research at N-ti store in Montreal in November and December of 2013. In early January, the Montreal location closed. The Mississauga and Malden stores are still open.

N-ti is an anomaly among the Islamic clothing stores in Montreal. Unlike many stores, N-ti's merchandise is not imported from the Middle East or Europe. The clothing is made in Canada and is meant to be clothing appropriate for Muslims living in Canada. This

[4] I was never able to interview Dikra Ait Nacere. This is an interview I found online.

appropriateness includes the style of clothing, the colours, and the type of material. The construction of Islamic identity at N-ti is a constant negotiation between modesty, Canadian-ness, and consumerism. The store's aim is to fill a niche of clothing options for Muslim women who do not want to import clothing from the Middle East, but have difficulty making dominant clothing fashions in Canada work for them. My research at N-ti investigates what it means to have a clothing store in Montreal with clothing made in Canada specifically for Muslim women, and how Muslim women consumers navigate the store.

Challenges to the Research

I faced several challenges throughout the course of my research that are important to outline at the outset of this dissertation. Many of these are political issues, business problems, technical difficulties, and changes that occurred during interviews with the participants. These challenges certainly influenced the research and what I wanted to investigate in the study. In some cases, the landscape in which this research was taking place completely transformed thereby influencing how I proceeded with my inquiry.

Bill 60

As mentioned above, the Parti Québécois announced the Charter of Quebec Values in the fall of 2013, and in November of 2013 it became Bill 60. I conducted many interviews with Muslim women before the announcement of the Charter. In some of the discussions, the political context was not as heightened as it was following the announcement of the Charter. In these latter interviews, the Charter of Quebec Values became an extremely heated point of discussion. While Bill 60 did not become law, in many of these interviews Muslim women distinguished between pre-Charter and post-Charter experiences. However, other major political events, specifically 9/11, also served as point of departure for many participants' political experience, and in turn, their embrace of or adherence to fashion styles that were reflective of their identities.

Stores in Montreal

I originally intended to conduct fieldwork in four Islamic clothing stores in Montreal. I found them on the Internet through Google searches, links on Islamic fashion websites, and discussions with friends. Ultimately when I attempted to undertake the fieldwork, some of the

stores I had identified—Boutique Hijabi, Khadija Mode, and Mecca Mode—were either closing or moving locations, making it difficult to reach someone at the establishment. Months later, I found new stores, but had advanced too far into my research to incorporate them. I ultimately decided to conduct research only at N-ti. N-ti served as a unique site for this research, a point I discuss at length in Chapter 6. However, N-ti also closed its Montreal location in January 2014, leaving me with only a month where I was able to conduct participant observation and interview five employees as well as the store owner.

The difficulty I experienced in finding sites for research for my dissertation demonstrates how Islamic fashion for Muslim women is such a niche market that being able to maintain a business that caters to this niche is a financial difficulty. Furthermore, many of these Islamic businesses need locations that consumers for this niche market will find and access easily. Finally, many of the Muslim women I interviewed stated that they did not shop at Islamic-specific clothing stores, an issue I discuss in subsequent chapters.

What this study is NOT

In discussing what this study is, it is also important to outline what this study is not. This is not an Islamic Studies research project. At no point in my analysis have I analyzed the responses these women made in reference to any Islamic schools of thought, or whether or not their choices and beliefs accurately reflect particular Qu'ranic verses or hadith. Whenever I used Qu'ranic quotations, it is to highlight or contextualize the comments my participants made, not to analyze or validate them according to established Islamic sources. The purpose of this study is to discuss and analyze how these Muslim women participants identify their clothing choices, practices, and religious views in relation to their experiences in the world, and specifically in Montreal, and how they came to these perspectives.

Further, while I am aware that in the dominant popular media, the contradiction between fashion and religion is applied to many religious communities, my concern here is with its application to the Muslim women and their practice of Islam. Similarly, though modesty is an issue that affects women from diverse religious communities and is a challenge that many women deal with in regards to dress, my focus here is on Muslim women living in Montreal and how they choose to define dress in accordance with their interpretations of being Muslim and living in a Western context. This does not mean that Muslim women had no sense of fashion

before they encountered the West or before the accumulated knowledge that can be categorized as Orientalist reshaped the discursive formation of the East and the West (see Zine, 2002). Rather, my aim here is to examine contemporary fashion practices as they interact with identity which is defined in religious terms and influenced by a specific context.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters which are bookended with an introduction and conclusion. In this introduction, I have outlined the scaffold on which I have constructed this inquiry, along with illustrative examples of some of the main issues that inform my point of departure. I have outlined the methodology and my key questions as well as some of the challenges that I faced in conducting my field research. In Chapter 1: Representations, I focus on dominant representations of Muslim women in media. Media representations of Muslim women have been analyzed at length in academic work and are therefore not the focal point of this study. Rather, this chapter is intended to demonstrate key issues in the field and what Muslim women are engaging with and responding to in their lives. Chapter 2: Re-Defining the Definitions, focuses on the definitions that are central to understanding the experiences of Muslim women. Here I include how my participants define the key terms in this study. Their definitions shift the focus from representations and dominant discourses about Muslim women to how Muslim women see and define their own lives. In Chapter 3: Muslim Women and the World of Fashion, I outline several fundamental theories that I used in analyzing my data. These include Roland Barthes's fashion theory, de Certeau's strategies and tactics, and also neoliberalism. I include literature on contemporary Islamic fashion to demonstrate a comparative perspective on similar research carried out in other geographical locations. In Chapter 4: The Montreal Scene: Muslim Women and Fashion, I elaborate on the Montreal context from politics to culture, as well as the fashion scene. In Chapter 5: Agency in Consumption: Using and Sharing the Tricks of the Trade, I focus on the lived experiences of Muslim women and their relationship to fashion. This is where I identify the kinds of tactics that Muslim women employ in their consumption and dress practices. This chapter expands on how these tactics are developed and how often they are changed. Chapter 6: Fashion and N-ti Fashion: Creating an Islamic Clothing Store in Montreal, focuses on my case study of the store N-ti outlining its history, current practices, the articulation of the N-ti brand, N-ti's attempts to

balance Islamic and neoliberal principles, and the challenges of running an Islamic business. I also focus on my interviews with N-ti employees. In Chapter 7: Don't Call it a Contradiction, I elaborate on how Muslim women discuss the concepts of fashion and Islam, and whether they regard these concepts as compatible or oppositional. The intention is to outline and discuss the conclusions reached by the participants and examine how their accounts respond to this final question: Are Islam and fashion compatible? Why? Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that there is no one uniform Muslim woman, as Maher suggests, and that Muslim women's decisions are not determined solely by who or what the West desires them to be. The last chapter offers the conclusion to this study. Titled Muslim Women for Sale, I revisit the starting point of this dissertation, outlining the route the research took and how it contributes to existing academic research.

Chapter 1:
On Representations

"…billionaires, bombers and belly dancers."
-Jack G. Shaheen, *The TV Arab*

In almost every conference presentation I have ever done on this topic, I begin with a discussion of the representations of Muslim women in the mainstream media for several reasons that all converge on one point: perception is reality. How Muslim women are perceived serves as a legitimate cause for how to police and govern their bodies. Something like the Charter of Quebec Values, which I discuss more at length in a following chapter, gains legitimacy by arguing that the elimination of headscarves will be a step towards gender equality. This is based on the notion that headscarves are oppressive towards women, that women wearing the headscarf are never making that choice freely, and that they need a Western governing power to grant them the right to take it off. This is not new thinking, and it is not the first time that the action to forcibly remove the headscarf has occurred. One can see how Muslim women living in the West always seem to be defined in relation to these dominant media tropes, and that all their actions and behaviours, are consistently attributed to religion. Hence, how Muslim women are represented to the world through media matters.

This chapter analyzes the evolution, longevity and strategic use of Muslim representations and, more specifically, Muslim women, and how these portrayals serve the West. Here, I use the word "West" in the sense intended by Stuart Hall (1992) as a discursive formation that signifies western, industrialized societies in opposition to "the rest" of the world. Through using several examples in this chapter, I demonstrate how even in the present context, the same stereotypes and assumptions about Muslim women are being perpetuated even through examples that are meant to dispel and problematize these long-held portrayals. In one way or another, it would seem as though these representations are never able to disengage from the ideological work they perform or from consumers who have become accustomed, if not primed, to their messages.

In the second half of this chapter, I include feedback from my participants about how they view the representations of Muslim women in media and how much of an impact such representations have on their lives. I explore how Muslim women respond to these representations, and ask whether their response is to change their appearance to appease the anxieties of the dominant population, or whether it encourages them to become more visible in their religiosity? In this chapter, I argue that while my participants are, by and large, aware of representations of Muslim women in media and politics, many of them see, in their role as visible minorities, a chance to teach, to change peoples' minds, and an opportunity to reverse people's stereotypical expectations of Muslim women. For the most part my participants are not making dress choices in any response to portrayals, but they do recognize how they are treated when they dress in specific ways.

Constructing the Stereotype

The quote that opens this chapter is from the book *The TV Arab* (1984), in which Jack G. Shaheen argues that television producers rely on "The Instant TV Arab Kit" (p. 5) when representing Arabs. This kit includes "belly dancer's outfit, headdresses (which look like tablecloths pinched from restaurant), veils, sunglasses, flowing gowns and robes, oil wells, limousines and/or camels" (p. 5). Furthermore, more often than not, these Arab representations are always Muslims (p. 15). The Arab and Muslim stereotypes are intrinsically connected and used as a means to demonstrate the difference between the East and West. The West is a Christian world; the East is a Muslim world (Said, 1994, p. 59). Shaheen cites Harve Bennett, a producer for the television shows *Six Million Dollar Man* and the *Bionic Woman*, who states that "stereotyping saves the writer 'the ultimate discomfort of having to think'" (p. 5). Therefore, writers draw upon a shared knowledge, or shared myth, about Muslims that has been constantly perpetuated and reinforced as shorthand. The kit is limited and constantly reused and, at times, reinterpreted, but at the core, these representations are the same. They may be packaged as dangerous, exotic, sexual, violent, or even normalized, but they always reveal the same symbolic truth about Muslims and Arabs in the media: they are different and they are a threat.

Even though Shaheen's book was published in 1984, not much has changed in the last 32 years. In fact, in his follow up book, *Reel Bad Arabs*, published in 2001, Shaheen includes a fairly comprehensive collection of films throughout the decades and demonstrates the use of the

same stereotypes of Arab and Muslim representations. In the introduction to the book, Shaheen asks the question "How did it all start? Obviously, filmmakers did not create the stereotype but inherited and embellished Europe's pre-existing Arab caricatures" (p. 7). These pre-existing stereotypes come from a long history of what Edward Said (1994) refers to as "Orientalism," in which the general geographic location of "the Orient" becomes defined and even created by Europeans. Said gives three meanings to Orientalism (p. 2). The first is Orientalism as an academic discipline where a scholar studies the Orient. However, as Said points out, the term "Orientalist" is rarely used now as it "connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth century European colonialism" (p. 2). The second meaning is of the Orient as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (p. 2). Many writers and philosophers have used this concept of difference between the Occident and the Orient as part of "elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customers, 'mind,' destiny, and so on" (pp. 2-3). Finally, the third meaning of Orientalism is "as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). The stereotypes Shaheen and Said discuss demonstrate that representations of Arabs, Muslims, and the Orient in general, have a long history, are carefully constructed, and always operate to place the West above the East.

In *Covering Islam*, Said (2007) discusses the term "Islam" and how it has become understood and used in Western culture. Said argues that the definition of "Islam" is both simple and complex stating "'Islam' as it is used today seems to mean one simple thing but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam" (p. l). Said specifically references the crisis in Iran as a way to show how Islam became "covered" in the American and European media: "they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it 'known'" (p. l-li). In their coverage of Islam, viewers are made to believe that they understand Islam because of the experts and thinkers who give their perspective on the particular news issue (p. li). The use of one word, "Islam," is similar to the short cut discursive device that Shaheen describes in relation to the "instant TV Arab kit", that allows viewers to know what is going on without having to go into more depth or apprehend the complexities.

Muslim women occupy a particular space in these representations. Shaheen identifies the representations of Muslim women as belonging to four broad categories of "'B' images" including: "bosomy bellydancers," "Beasts of Burden," "Bundles of Black," "Black magic vamps or enchantresses 'possessed of devils'," and "bombers" (2001, pp. 22-23). In her work, Amira Jarmakani (2008) also focuses on the elements closely associated with the representation of Muslim women, identifying them as "the veil, the harem, and the belly dancer" (p. 2). She argues that these images have been part of the American consumer sphere for over a century and exemplify "themes of erotic fantasy, patriarchal domination, and tradition and timelessness" (p. 2). These representations continue to be re-introduced in a new way (Jarmakani, 2008, p. 3). These elements work in concert, not necessarily in a seamless way, to produce representations of Arab, and by extension Muslim, women that make the East more accessible, more dangerous, and completely Othered. For instance, both the veil and the harem have served as a source of inaccessibility to the Orient on the part of European travelers. It is the because of the strong connotation between women and culture or as "the essence of the Orient" (Yeğenoğlu, 1999, p. 99) that the veil has occupied a central place in this imaginary terrain. Thus, for European colonial powers, it became "all the more important to lift the veil, for *unveiling and thereby modernizing the woman of the Orient signified the transformation of the Orient itself*" (Yeğenoğlu, 1999, p. 99, emphasis in original). The accessibility to the Muslim woman then served as a signifier of the colonizer's complete access to the colonized.

Leila Ahmed (1982) argues that Western men often reported about the events in the harem without ever receiving access to the space (p. 524). However, this did not stop them from detailing and assuming what occurred in the harem: "What recurs in Western men's accounts of the harem is prurient speculation, often taking the form of downright assertion, about women's sexual relations with each other within the harem" (p. 524). Jarmakani (2008) identifies the harem operating as "a symbolic representation of the contest for power between Ottoman and European forces. As such, the French attributed great meaning to the walls of the harem, confronting them as the tangible representative barriers to outside access" (p. 36). The representation of the harem's interiorized space served to make "Arab womanhood conquerable" (p. 36). The harem, then, serves as a site of inaccessible hypersexuality that is constantly being portrayed in an attempt to own it. However, as Ahmed points out, the representation of the activity inside the harem is imagined and constructed to serve an image that the West needed in

order to maintain its moral superiority to the East, as well as enabling its use of that sexuality to appease Western imagination and desires. While the veil and the harem are both discussed in terms of the way they operate to conceal women's bodies, by suggesting that what they conceal is in some way sexually deviant, the West is portrayed as having a superior degree of propriety and decency. The meaning attached to the harem, then, does not need to be based on any actual experiences, but rather on what works to maintain a power structure between the West and the East. The veil and the harem then function as barriers to access and thus become identified as signs of oppression that need to be dismantled.

Since the private lives of Muslim women were hidden from male observers, it was through the speculation and experiences of Western women who were able to access these areas that these scenes were revealed to a Western gaze. However, as Yeğenoğlu (1999) claims, although the information gleaned by women who entered the harem was valued as important, it was only considered secondary to that of men (p. 78). As she contends, this gaze becomes masculinized and was given prominence due to its access. One noteworthy example of this is that of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu who travelled to the Orient and communicated detailed accounts of her experiences in spaces that only allowed women (p. 90). However, her accounts were converted into the masculine gaze as "[b]y rendering visible the invisible space of the harem, Montagu not only serves the purpose of fulfilling the Western voyeuristic pleasure, but also constitutes herself as the gazing Eye/I" (p. 90). Her perspective is given credibility not only because her gender allows her admittance, but more importantly, because her gaze becomes masculine through the process.

The image of the belly dancer seems to differ from the veil and the harem as the belly dancer is accessible, known, and is willing. While the idea of the belly dancer would operate as a means to demonstrate the liberation of women in contrast to the oppression connoted through the veil, Jamarkani (2008) argues that, in fact, the image of the belly dancer served "[a]s a marked contrast to the rigid and contained corseted bodies of the Victorian era, the belly dancers' bodies became known for a fluidity and freedom of movement that was both 'passionate' and 'disgusting'" (p. 65). The representation of sexuality did not operate to create an image of progress, but rather one reflecting a kind of primitive and unbridled sexuality, which as Jamarkani argues, conflicted with Victorian values. Said (1994) cites the work of Edward William Lane to illustrate how sexuality in the Orient was connoted as "exud[ing] dangerous

sex" (p. 167). The belly dancer still serves as a way to represent the backwardness of the Orient in comparison to her European and American counterparts.

Hollywood has used the elements of the veil, the harem, and the belly dancer in many films. One film in particular, in which there is a fleeting moment where the star is dressed in a veil, is *The Mummy* (1999). In that film, Rachel Weisz (Figure 9) stars as a librarian who takes part in an archeological adventure. In a short scene, she changes her clothes and walks away from a group of, presumably Arab, women. The women are dressed in opaque veils, while Weisz wears a transparent and bejeweled niqab. The replacement of the white body instead of the Arab body, as well as a transparent veil, serves to make this character exotic and sexual, but in a safe way. She is donning the Other's clothes, so the danger associated with the Other does not attach itself to her. Jarmakani (2008) argues that while the representation of the virginal and veiled Muslim woman and the sexual belly dancer seem contradictory, "the structural similarity between them lies in the way both function as visual vocabulary for structures of feeling rooted in the notions of power and progress" (p. 7). She concludes that "the seemingly diverse images of veiled women, reclining odalisques, and belly dancers have actually remained static and stable signifiers of both the exoticism and the invisibility of Arab women, suggesting a similar structural foundation for all three mythologies" (p. 52). The veil, the harem, and the belly dancer seem to be frozen in time and serve to entrench the East-West binary where the latter is constructed as progressive and superior.

Figure 9: Rachel Weisz in *The Mummy,* screenshot. Reprinted according to fair dealing clause (Copright Act, Section 29.1).

Ultimately, the stereotypes around Muslim women began from a masculine, Western perspective in which the Orient had to remain Othered, dangerous, and exotic in order for the West to remain a symbol of power and civilization, and to support projects of colonization into the general area known as the Orient. These representations are relevant when it comes to fashion. While the specific terms that are used to describe Muslim women will be discussed at length in the following chapter, here I look at the ways in which fashion and Islam are discussed in the sphere of popular culture, specifically on the Internet. I do so in order to demonstrate the

manner in which these same ideals around civilization and Otherness operate through a discussion of clothing. As mentioned in the introduction, dress practices are often used to signify larger, inherent and essentialized differences between the colonizer and the colonized. In the case of Muslim women, the concept of wearing a headscarf and the general concealment of skin is constantly construed as a difference from non-Muslim women in terms of their dress preferences and comportment. It is a difference that connotes a lack of gender equality for Muslim women. In this respect, how Islamic fashion is discussed in popular platforms speaks to the way in which the idea of a fashionable Muslim woman is constructed. Dressing in "Western" clothing suggests an assimilated Muslim woman whereas dressing in "Islamic" or "Eastern" attire implies oppression.

The Internet and Islamic Fashion

This constructed difference between types of dress served as a major starting point for this dissertation as it focuses on how the media portrays Muslim women as either oppressed, or assimilated, and by association, liberated, Muslim women. Fashion is part of these representations. Bright colours and Western-styled clothing are meant to contrast with the black abaya, which is associated with oppressed Muslim women. Between May 2013 and May 2015, I began tracking online articles that addressed the topic of Muslim women and fashion. I used the key words "Islamic fashion" and "Muslim fashion" to conduct my searches and set up an alert to receive emails with these keywords. I kept the terms intentionally broad in order to receive anything that would, even indirectly, acknowledge the topic. In my initial search, I found relevant articles from 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011, and 2012, as well as articles published before May 2013. I considered any article, regardless of the website, as long as it addressed the topic. My intent was not to engage in a rigorous search but rather to gain insight into how these terms were being discussed and debated. Below I outline the ways that online articles dealt with the topic of Islam and fashion, even when they attempted to speak positively on the topic. What became increasingly apparent when reading these articles was the seeming incompatibility of these two terms, and the awkwardness when different writers tried to make these two concepts function.

One manner in which the dissonance between Islam and fashion was portrayed was in the titles of the articles that were meant to attract readers' attention. The term "hijab" was often

employed in these titles to highlight the constructed oppositional nature of the concepts of Islam and fashion. For example, "Hip in a Hijab: Teenage Muslim Girls took my Breath Away" (Janmohamed, 2015), "High Heels and Hijabs" (Lamb, 2014), and "'Underwraps': Muslim Models Maintain Modesty with Fashion Agency" (Sacirbey, 2013). These titles take the words "hip," "high heels," "models," and contrast them with the words "hijab" and "modesty." Employing these kinds of titles makes Islam and fashion seem incredibly oppositional and extremely disparate in order to highlight their differences. The titles place the terms in stark contrast, are seemingly humorous, and all lead to the same idea -- that these concepts cannot coexist. These titles seem to operate as a form of "clickbait," a way to attract readers to click on their articles. The titles appear to be intentionally provocative in nature.

Another group of titles highlights the contradiction between Islam and fashion by asking questions. For example, several titles ask the following questions: "Who said the 'Hijab' can't be Fashionable?" (Capital Lifestyle, 2013), "Why is Islamic Clothing so Inspirational?" (Dinu, n.d.), "Is Muslim Fashion Finally 'On Trend'?," (Ilyas, 2012), "Are Faith and Fashion Compatible?" (Reem, 2011). These titles suggest that not only is the concept of Islamic fashion peculiar, but that this peculiarity is a veritable feature that demands further interrogation. By asking if faith and fashion are compatible, the titles seem to suggest that it is already an established truth that they are not. Contemplating why the headscarf can be fashionable suggests that someone has already claimed and proven that it is not. These questions are hardly questions, but statements about an already established understanding of how Islam is viewed in regards to fashion. While the articles problematize these assertions, the titles demonstrate that a widely held belief is being questioned. Asking "who said the hijab can't be fashionable?" implies the article is going to address this question, but that they are already making an argument against an already widely held belief that the hijab cannot, in fact, be fashionable.

Finally, another group of titles focuses on how Muslim women are mixing their interest in fashion with their religion. These titles include the following: "US Muslim Solves Fashion Modesty Dilemma" (2013), "Muslim Designers Mix Hijab with Latest Fashions" (Khalil, 2010), and "Dubai Women are Wearing Bumpits Under Hijabs: 'Camel Humps'" (Breslaw, 2013). These titles suggest a level of agency on the part of Muslim women who are actually engaging with fashion, but again, with the understanding that there is a dilemma. The word "mix" suggests that these women are not already interested in fashion or that fashion does not mix

seamlessly with Islam. This "mix" implies that there is a mode of dress that is "fashionable" and a mode of dress that is "Islamic," and that these two categories are mutually exclusive. These titles imply that Islam and fashion are at odds with each other, but the articles use these assertions in order to critique and further problematize this belief. The starting point for these articles is the question of compatibility as if easing the reader into the notion that Islamic fashion could, in fact, exist. The titles also suggest that Muslims are doing something antithetical to their own religion and that perhaps this is a new evolution on the part of particular Muslims.

However, apart from these titles, other themes and specific cases were covered in the media with regards to fashion and Islam. These cases show up often in the news because there is almost a spectacle attached to them as they either stress the oppositionality of Islam and fashion or they marvel at the way individuals are aiming to combine Islam and fashion.

The Legal Issue

One of the high profile stories I came across in my searches dealt with a Supreme Court ruling in the United States. Titled "Supreme Court Seems to Side with Muslim woman in Discrimination Case" (Barnes, 2015), the story outlines a case where, Samantha Elauf, a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf, was denied a job at Abercrombie & Fitch, a well-known clothing store. The article recounted that Abercrombie & Fitch's defence was that Elauf did not state in the interview that she was wearing the headscarf due to her religious observance, and that "was necessary to trigger a federal law that prevents religious discrimination in hiring and requires employers to either offer accommodation or say why it would impose a substantial burden" (para. 3). Even though the employee interviewing Elauf and a supervisor discussed that Elauf was wearing the headscarf as part of her religion, "she [Elauf] could not meet the company's 'Look Policy,' which promotes an East Coast collegiate preppy style that prohibits caps and the color black" (para. 12). This sentence highlights how the headscarf does not fit the East Coast collegiate preppy style. The fact that the headscarf cannot be combined with this particular aesthetic style was used as the grounds not hiring Elauf. In this case, there was no sense that the headscarf could be adapted to fit the style, seemingly because it is associated with connotations that do not conform to an East Coast collegiate preppy look.

This case is particularly interesting, as Elauf took her complaint to the Supreme Court and won. The issues of the headscarf, fashion, and consumerism became a huge debate in court.

Was this really a case of the headscarf not fitting into a "look" policy, or was it a case of discriminatory hiring practices? Judging by the Supreme Court ruling, it would seem that this was a case of discriminatory hiring practices. However, the fact that Abercrombie and Fitch's argument was framed around her headscarf as not being part of the "preppy" style makes an interesting point about the perceived incompatibility of Islam and fashion, especially since this argument was used to justify Elauf not receiving the job.

Considering this case in relation to representations and stereotypes of Muslim women, it would seem as though the Muslim woman is not being discriminated against for religious reasons, but rather because her sense of style does not accord with the particular style of the store, regardless of what she might wear in addition to the headscarf. Here, the headscarf serves as a symbol and signifier of an incompatibility with Western culture and, furthermore, an inability to conform or integrate successfully into the West. Fashion, then, through a popular brand like Abercrombie & Fitch, operates as a stand in for the West; the two are inextricably linked here, and the woman's headscarf is connected to her Otherness and Eastern identity.

The Pageant Response

During my searches, a major topic came up on the Internet in relation to Islam and fashion: The Miss World pageant (Miss World, n.d.) that took place in Indonesia on September 28th, 2013. The pageant was controversial since it was to take place in a predominantly Muslim majority country. According to *Al-Arabiya English*, "Indonesia's top Islamic authority lashed out Friday at the country's decision to host the Miss World beauty pageant next month, saying that women exposing their bodies went against Muslim teaching" (No world peace?, 2013). As a result, the Miss World pageant decided to eliminate bikinis from the bathing suit competition and include sarongs for more coverage (No world peace?, 2013, para. 12). They also moved the location for the final pageant from Jakarta to Bali because the population in Bali is predominantly Hindu (Indonesia to host Miss World, 2013, para. 4), and presumably would not have the same objections as the Muslim population.

The deputy head of the Indonesia Ulema Council (MUI), Amirsyah Tambunan, criticized the pageant, saying, "The contest tries to trick people by saying that it's not only a physical beauty contest but also to show inner beauty" (No world peace?, 2013, para. 7). This group also encouraged Muslims not to watch the pageant on television (No world peace?, 2013, para. 6).

Leading up to the pageant, many groups were planning on protesting the event. The head of the East Java province's branch of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) stated that they were planning on protesting the event "because it is unacceptable" (Indonesia to host Miss World, 2013, para. 6). This caused the organizers of the pageant to increase their security: "Almost 500 police ha[d] been deployed to guard venues link[ed] to Miss World since the pageant began and almost 700 will be on duty on Saturday" (Indonesia to host Miss World, 2013, para. 19). The winner of the Miss World pageant, crowned September 28th, 2013, was Miss Philippines, Megan Young. She was 23 years old, born in the United States, and raised in the Philippines from the age of 10 (Evans, 2013, para. 9). Even though groups were planning on protesting, "police said no rallies were staged" (Evans, 2013, para. 12).

While some responded to the pageant by protesting, others responded by participating in the World Muslimah pageant to counter the Miss World pageant. The World Muslimah pageant was organized by the Muslim women's group, World Muslimah Foundation (Marks, 2013, para. 3). They called it an "'Islamic response' to the Miss World furore: a beauty contest […] featuring 20 modestly dressed women from Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Brunei, Nigeria and Bangladesh" (Marks, 2013, para. 3). Pageant founder Eka Shanti, stated that she began the pageant after losing her TV anchor job three years ago when she would not remove her headscarf (Nigerian wins Muslim beauty pageant rival to Miss World, 2013, para. 10). The following is a description of the event as outlined on the website:

> The event "for Muslim ladies" will respect religious traditions, and has the blessing of Islamic scholars, according to the Asia News website. Outfits will reflect "the colours of the Muslim world", and beauty will not be the only criterion, said one of the organisers, Eka Shanty. Rather, contestants will be judged on the three "Ss."—smartness, style and sholehah (good morals). (Marks, 2013, para. 4)

Shanti outlined the criteria for the Muslimah World pageant as the following: "Muslimah World is a beauty pageant, but the requirements are very different from Miss World—you have to be pious, be a positive role model and show how you balance a life of spirituality in today's modernised world" (Indonesia to hold Miss World for Muslims, 2013, para. 3). There is a distinction being made here about the requirements so there are no misunderstandings. This pageant is not about looks, sexuality, and immodesty; it has religious motivations and attempts to make such a distinction clear so as to underscore its difference from the Miss World pageant.

The pageant featured 20 finalists who took part in preliminary rounds that were conducted online. They were judged on "reciting Quranic verses and telling stories of how they came to wear the Islamic headscarf, a requirement for the pageant" (Indonesia to hold Miss World for Muslims, 2013, para. 5). Shanti stated that the Miss World pageant should still go ahead as it planned to illustrate the diversity in Indonesia and to "show our children they have choices. Do you want to be like the women in Miss World? Or like those in Muslimah?" (Indonesia to hold Miss World for Muslims, 2013, para. 8). On September 18, 21-year-old Nigerian Obabiyi Aishah Ajibola was crowned the winner of the Muslimah World pageant (Nigerian wins Muslim beauty pageant rival to Miss, 2013, para. 3). Upon winning, Ajibola stated that "[w]e're just trying to show the world that Islam is beautiful" (Nigerian wins Muslim beauty pageant rival to Miss, 2013, para. 8).

While it is important to note that Muslims are using non-violent, creative means to respond to normative conventions of beauty, the question is, in what way did the Muslimah pageant define Muslim beauty? The judging criteria listed above demonstrate that beauty is not the only criteria for participants; women are also being judged on their piousness, if they are good role models and good women. Muslimah World is still using the conventions of the Miss World beauty pageant and simply changed certain features to adapt to an Islamic context. Hence, there are some ways in which the Muslimah World pageant is similar to Miss World and some ways in which it is different.

These two cases reveal several aspects of the issue of Islam and fashion. The first case shows that it is unconstitutional for an employee wearing the headscarf to not receive a job because of her headscarf, and therefore seems to suggest that Muslim women can exist within the fashion realm and that it is illegal to discriminate against a woman wearing a headscarf. The second case concerning the pageant draws a distinction between two kinds of fashion, and that fashion within Islam should focus on inner beauty only. Even the pageant organizers created a clear distinction between what is acceptable Islamic fashion and what is unacceptable, suggesting that there are ways in which Islam is incompatible with fashion. I use these two cases to demonstrate the manner in which fashion and Islam are identified as contradictory and how such a conflict has real world ramifications. One employee loses her chance at a job due to this incompatibility, but ultimately wins her case in court, while in another instance, an alternative is created in order to create a new concept of fashion and beauty that is specific to Muslim women.

However, this new type of fashion and beauty maintains much of the old criteria, and uses judgment of appearance and religiosity to define a winner. An overlapping aspect of these two cases is how the concept of fashion is created and imposed on Muslim women and how it is up to Muslim women to fit themselves within these parameters. In the following chapter, I discuss how Muslim women themselves redefine these terms and how they translate them into their daily lives.

Signs of Change?

Several of the articles move beyond this dichotomy and speak about the change in the fashion world in terms of Islamic influence. Different articles discuss the way that Muslim women's lives are changing through fashion. First, fashion gives Muslim women a "way to express themselves in a completelydifferent [sic] way" (Capital Lifestyle, 2013, para. 3). One article even claims that changing ideas about fashion have even influenced the way that Muslim women engage with society, arguing that

> Muslim women would traditionally not go to work, their role would be as a parent and homemaker, predominantly. Now, as the perceived barriers that old attitudes to clothing have been broken down, more Islamic females than ever before are playing multiple roles in their own lives, and society as a whole, going to work full-time, still being parents, and having a healthy social life, too. (Dinu, n.d., para. 11)

This way of thinking gives a significant amount of credit to the clothing and fashion industry and little credit to Muslim women themselves. It further assumes that Muslim women were not already part of the job market, which is the reason that Islamic clothing is considered "so inspirational." Finally, the statement also makes the assumption that Muslim women typically do not work outside of the home, a claim that is not backed up and certainly not specific to only Muslim women.

Another way that Islamic fashion is being discussed and covered in online media is through interventions in the fashion industry by Muslim women themselves, not just how they change clothing. One example is Barjis Chohan, a designer in the United Kingdom whose goal is to fill "a gap in the market flooded with polyester abayas and over-embellished abayas that are impractical and only suitable for special occasions" (Ilyas, 2012, para. 2) Another article focuses on another fashion designer, Amina Al-Jassim from Saudi Arabia, who feels that "fashion does

not have to mean showing more of woman's body but can be stylish and modest without being revealing" (Reem, 2011, para. 4). Yet another article focuses on a Muslim fashion agency called Underwraps (Sacirbey, 2013). Nailah Lymus, a Muslim woman, formed the agency after she created her fashion label, Amirah Creations. The agency is meant to serve as a way for Muslim women who do not want to violate their religious beliefs to find jobs as models (Sacirbey, 2013, para. 1). The agency also caters to non-Muslims, because Lymus "believes that the demand for modest clothing cuts across religions and cultures" (Sacirbey, 2013, para. 1). Finally, in an article by Khalil, "Muslim Designers Mix Hijabs with Latest Fashions" the two women she interviewed both responded that "[f]ashion is about expression 'and this is a legitimate part of Islam'" (Khalil, 2010, para. 28) and further that, "Islam doesn't prescribe rigid rules of colour or style it just says these are the areas you need to cover, the rest is really up to you" (Khalil, 2010, para. 29). This last statement demonstrates that even with all these developments in fashion, Islam, and the way Muslims are intervening in the industry, there are still stereotypical attitudes that foster a belief that Islam and fashion clash.

Example: Countess of Wessex

As mentioned above, the discussion about Muslim women and fashion often revolves around the unknown, the sexualized, and the exotic, and how this world is represented often depends on a female, Western agent who can penetrate into its interiors and relay this information. For example, the Countess of Wessex made news recently when she made a comment regarding Muslim women and fashion. She hosted an event at Windsor Castle with individuals from the Islamic Fashion Festival, and made comments that supported Muslim women who chose to wear modest clothing while also expressing their interest in fashion. She stated that what "people forget is that underneath the burka and everything else, there is somebody who is probably wearing something really quite fashionable" (Press Association, 2014, para. 5). While the Countess's comment was seemingly a sign of support, it also played into the exotic fantasy of discovering what is under the veil. With this comment, the Countess reinforced the very stereotype she was actively aiming to dispel. Furthermore, her comment suggests that a Muslim woman's interest in fashion can only exist as long as it relates to what can be worn underneath cultural and traditional clothing.

The Countess of Wessex's Western gaze serves as a liaison, as a legitimate source of information for what Muslim women wear underneath their veils. It is she who assures the West that they can be fashionable underneath their veils, in their private spaces. There is also a contrast here in terms of what counts as fashionable. The burqas the world sees are not considered fashionable, but what may be worn underneath can be. This allows the viewer/reader to use their imagination as to what Muslim women could be wearing underneath their outwardly Islamic attire. Much like paintings of the harem that were created based on speculation from Western women's accounts, what a Muslim woman might wear under their veils is up to the speculation of the individual. There is also a sense of salaciousness by the fact that a Muslim woman might wear something that they are not *allowed* to wear in public under their clothes. Overall, the seemingly innocuous comment made by the Countess of Wessex is loaded with centuries of carefully crafted stereotypes about Muslim women, and not once is the Muslim woman's voice included in the conversation. Muslim women can be fashionable, but it is a secret!

Example: Liaisons Dangereuses

The excitement and thrill of discovering the treasure and beauty that lies beneath the Muslim woman's veil has also been employed in a much discussed lingerie advertisement. The German lingerie company Liaisons Dangereuses employed this same trope in their commercial, making the Muslim woman an ultimately consumable object. The advertisement (MrToothBreaker, 2009) portrays a woman in several layers of undress: first naked, then wearing lingerie and pantyhose, and finally, donning an abaya as she prepares to leave her home. Her skin seems to be of an olive tone and her hair is dark brown. The advertisement ends as the woman, dressed in her abaya, gazes out the window into the public sphere. It is at this moment that the viewer recognizes that this woman is a Muslim woman

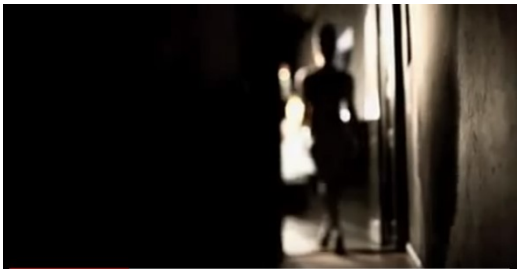

Figure 10: Liaisons Dangereuses advertisement from Youtube.com. Reprinted according to fair dealing clause (Copyright Act, Section 29.1).

Figure 11: Liaisons Dangereuses advertisement from Youtube.com. Reprinted according to fair dealing clause (Copyright Act, Section 29.1).

Figure 12: Liaisons Dangereuses advertisement from Youtube.com. Reprinted according to fair dealing clause (Copyright Act, Section 29.1).

who also seems to have features that suggest an Arab heritage. The tagline for the advertisement is "Sexiness for everyone. Everywhere."

I first came across this advertisement on a blog, but soon found that it had generated a variety of responses from all over the Internet. What does it all mean? What does it mean to see a Muslim woman in lingerie? The discussion was mostly centered around the provocative nature of the advertisement, as it included a Muslim woman, both naked and wearing lingerie. Many suggested that this advertisement was either empowering to Muslim women or that it stereotyped them. The website *Animal* stated that the advertisement could be understood as "empowering to women, especially women in certain desert nations; or promoting stereotypical Western views" (Copyranter, 2009, para. 1). As Dodai Stewart wrote on *Jezebel*, "[T]he woman in the commercial [can be seen] as confident and self-assured; or […] as the embodiment of a Western stereotype: The vixen under the veil" (Stewart, 2009, para. 3). Despite these two opposing viewpoints, several websites promoted the idea that the advertisement was empowering. Aimee Picchi stated that the ad was "daring" (2010, para. 3) and that it "sends a positive message that goes well beyond hawking lacy teddies. Whether a person is wearing a sweatsuit or burqa, their true identity cannot be parsed by their outward appearance" (2010, para. 3). Sasha Muradali echoed this statement stating that "this advert sends a positive message to women that: no matter what you look like, sweatpants, tartans or a burqa—you too are sexy" (2010, para. 8). Many focused on the twist at the end of the advert, which does not reveal the woman to be a Muslim until she throws her abaya over her head. Regardless of how the advertisement has been received, the Muslim woman as a consumer is represented through what the public eye does not see until the very end. Furthermore, even in her activity of consumption, she becomes a consumable object. Through this ad, as Lalvani argues, her Otherness is "flirted with" and made to be an "exotic sign" for Western consumers (Lalvani, 1995, p. 282). Her identity and style exist only under the veil, and the public cannot see that unless they are privy to the process by which she is assembled (getting dressed). This dichotomy suggests that either Muslim women

wear abayas, or some form of cultural dress, or they wear Western clothing only underneath their abayas.

Focusing on the representations of Muslim women in popular media allows for an understanding and point of departure for one aspect of what Muslim women face in their daily lives. Analyzing these depictions and where they come from serves to demonstrate the ways in which dress and fashion are considered disconnected from a Muslim woman's experience. Even online articles addressing the topic of Muslim women and fashion title their pieces in ways that acknowledge the dissonance between these terms at the outset as though to prove a long-held belief, possibly even a truth, as wrong. However, this dissertation is not solely interested in these representations, but what Muslim women think of these depictions and if they influence how they live, practice, and ultimately, dress.

Muslim Women Talk Representations

> *Je suis une image sur deux pieds, malgré moi, même si moi je ne veux pas l'être. Malgré, il y a plein de monde qui veulent pas être le centre, ils ne veulent pas représenter ça. Parce que, moi, je représente pas, je suis pas la meilleure des femmes voilées, mais au même temps, malgré moi, j'ai cette sous-poil-là sur les épaules que moi je représente.* (Arij)[5]

The women who participated in my study were familiar with the range of stereotypical representations of Muslim women in the mainstream media. When I asked them how they would describe these representations, they spoke about the common traits they had observed: submissive, backwards, the wife of a terrorist, the need to be saved by the West, hypersexualized, and always wearing black. However, these stereotypical representations are not confined only in the media; they also impact how Muslim women are perceived in their everyday lives. For example, Sorouja commented, "*I think what tends to happen is people show Muslim women as back-dated, you know. And I'll see some people look at me and they'll think she's dressed in a backward, primitive, even, way.*" Amal stated that the media chooses specific cases that will attract attention from the public. The rest of this chapter describes Muslim women's own ideas about their dress choices.

[5] Translation: I am an image on two feet, despite myself, even if I do not want to be. Despite, there are plenty of people who do not want to be the center, they do not want to represent that. Because, me, I don't represent, I am not the best of the veiled women, but at the same time, in spite of myself, I have this undercoat on my shoulders that I represent.

Muslim Women Respond

> *Pour moi, qu'est-ce qui est important, c'est qu'est-ce que Dieu pense. Parce que cette vie c'est un passage, puis quand on va mourir il va falloir répondre de nos actions devant Dieu. On va pas répondre à nos voisins ou à la femme qui nous a vues dans la rue, ou à nos parents, on n'est pas responsables de qu'est-ce que les gens pensent et je pense qu'il faut, que ça soit dans n'importe quel aspect de notre vie, il faut pas avoir, vivre selon qu'est-ce que les gens vont penser de moi, parce que, sinon, tu vivrais plus, tu sortirais plus de ta maison.* (Yousra)[6]

The Muslim women I interviewed were cognizant of how the media represents them. They are aware of the representations of oppressed Muslim women in media and in the news. How they feel about these representations and how they decide to react to them demonstrates the different ways in which Muslim women negotiate their identities. Taking into consideration these representations, my question was whether Muslim women in Montreal let it influence the way they dress? The short answer to this question is no.

Although my participants do not choose their clothing based on what other people may think of them, they do recognize the difference in how they are treated when they dress in ways that can be considered "stereotypically Muslim" or "Western." Many scholars have discussed the way Muslim women identify clothing that is perceived to be less threatening or more pleasing in the Western context. For example, Christiansen (2011) employs Goffman's theoretical framework of "impression management" to conceptualize Muslim women's Islamic fashion in Denmark. In her study, Christiansen found that "impression management emerges in the interviews; in the women's representations of themselves, whether they style their clothing as distinctly or as ambiguously Islamic" (p. 348). She remarks that some women manage their appearance by dressing in a way that "does not intimidate or seem appalling to others by appearing 'too Muslim', specifically in the eyes of non-Muslims" (p. 339). However, Muslim women are still choosing clothing based on their own aesthetic taste (p. 339) and not as a means to "blur the image of a Muslim woman" (p. 347). In Turkey, Gökariksel and Secor (2009) also discuss how Muslim women choose "lighter colours and more 'pleasing' styles" as a means of

[6] Translation: For me, what is important, it's what God thinks. Because this life is a passage, then when we die we will have to answer for our actions before God. We are not going to answer to our neighbours or the woman who saw us in the street, or our parents, we are not responsible for what people think and I think we need to, be it in any aspect of our lives, we don't need to, live according to what people will think of me, because, otherwise you would not live, you would never leave your home.

"dispel[ling] the negative associations of the veil, but also to position themselves as fashion-conscious consumers, integrating into 'modern' society—as a profitable niche market" (p. 10). They contend that many Muslim women avoid wearing black, due to the association of black with "conservatism and fundamentalism" (2009, p. 10). In the study, "United Fashions" (2004), the authors discuss how one of their respondents stated that although she wore black coloured garments before she converted to Islam, she now avoids wearing the colour because "people think that her religion demands she wear it" (Koskennurmi-Sivonen, Koivula, Maijala, 2004, p. 448). This is similar to what my interviewee Loubna stated when she commented on how people look at her depends on whether or not she wears colourful clothing and jeans, or is all dressed in black: "*J'ai remarqué un truc en fait, parce que je porte quand même des jeans des fois puis je les porte avec des chemises, je me fais regarder moins croche que quand je mets, quand je suis habillée comme ça, en noir avec une jupe*."[7] Wurood, another interviewee, mentioned that she enjoys wearing colours and wears them because it is part of her personal taste, but she also recognized that it could break the stereotype of the Muslim woman dressed all in black. None of the interviewees discussed avoiding black coloured garments altogether because they did not want to be considered extremists, but they were aware of the difference in their encounters depending on whether they dressed in colours or in black.

While everyone I interviewed responded that they did not change how they dressed to make themselves acceptable to mainstream Quebec society, participants did report that they used different tactics to deal with the criticism they receive. Some women said they choose not to respond and that they do not feel that they owed an explanation for how they dressed. Interviewee Khaoula's approach is to educate people, based on her perception that people's fear of the headscarf is based on ignorance. Her desire is to bridge the gap and create an understanding about what the headscarf means to Muslim women. This was echoed in other responses, in which the women discussed that they would not change the way they dressed, but rather, with how they behaved. One of my interviewees, Marie, offered the following:

> *I'm not really concerned about the way I dress about what people think about it. I'm more concerned about my behaviour. I try to smile more than I would usually do, because I'm not usually that smiley people say, try to say "bonjour" to the bus driver and I try to be really nice just to give a good image of Islam so people know*

[7] Translation: I noticed one thing actually, because I wear jeans sometimes and when I wear them with shirts, I'm looked at less crooked than when I wear, when I'm dressed like this, in black with a skirt.

> *that we're just, we're regular women, you know. We're humans under our hijab. And nice people also, I try to show the good side of Islam that they just never see in the media.*

Kenza stated that she smiles at strangers because "*people don't always make eye contact with me. I'll just have a smile on so they don't have to even think maybe she's oppressed at this point.*" These women attempted to de-emphasize the importance placed on their dress practices and instead redirected the focus on to their behaviour.

However, there were also several participants who felt that they were not visibly perceived as Muslim because they did not have characteristics that immediately identified them as such. These characteristics included not wearing the headscarf, not appearing Arab, dressing in a way that is not commonly associated with Muslim women, and not having an accent when speaking English. However, this often proved to be frustrating as well; oftentimes, these women expressed that when they identify themselves as Muslim, they are met with shock and disbelief, which makes them feel as if they need to do more to claim their Muslim identity. For example, Dina said that it was "annoying" to be considered "Western" because of the barrage of questions that comes next. In her interview, she remarked: "*People are quite surprised that you're Muslim because you don't be, like, you don't dress for them, you don't dress like a Muslim. You don't dress, you don't wear the veil, you go out, you drink, you know, things like that. They find it shocking at some point, they're like, 'really?'*" Sally, another interviewee, said she doesn't "*fit the mould*"; relating that wearing or not wearing the headscarf serves as a "*demarcation line*" for what it means to be dressed like a Muslim. She continued by saying that *"it doesn't matter if I don't wear a tank tops or like, you know, 'revealing clothing'*." These Muslim women were being criticized for not falling into line and for not appearing the way Muslim women have been constructed in the media, while other Muslim women were criticized for appearing too Muslim-like. Their responses demonstrate that having one definition of Muslim dress is limiting, because it eliminates many people who identify as Muslim but whose appearances do not correspond to images of Muslim women in the media.

Yasmin, however, recounted how her feelings about how she dresses and that what she tries to communicate through her clothing has changed over the course of her life. She is of Yemeni descent and grew up in Denmark. She said that before she was in high school, she went to a school with primarily Danish students and she would avoid wearing the black abaya: "*I was*

very self-conscious about wearing even though, like, you know in my family, or Yemeni culture as well, it's very, it's part of our dress." She continued, saying that her nervousness came from being worried about "*the bad representations of how a Muslim with a dark dress and dark clothes and all of that*." Her perspective changed when she went to a high school with more Muslim students. She saw that they were more comfortable experimenting, with "*not just Danish, Danish styles of dress and making it modest, but also just wearing the abaya and be like, no I'm gonna wear it, you know, and I'm gonna wear it with a colourful hijab.*" This participant demonstrated that a Muslim woman's relationship with her dress can change over the course of her life. As Reina Lewis (2013) remarks about modest fashion, "[m]odest dress can mean different things to different women and can change meanings over the course of their lives" (p. 3). The interviewee's feelings, now that she no longer worries about how she is being perceived, are a result of years of living in different social contexts and her experiences navigating through them. At one point, the abaya made her feel uncomfortable because it made her different from her classmates and associated her with a "bad" Muslim stereotype, but when she was surrounded by more Muslim women, she found the strength to be less concerned with the image her dress represented to people. Muslim dress, as well as life as a Muslim in a non-Muslim majority context, is a lifelong navigation.

Conclusion

The representations of Muslim women in dominant mainstream media are prevalent and unchanging. Whether they are paintings from the 1800s or a lingerie commercial in the 21st century, the portrayals of Muslim women maintain the image of Muslim women as exotic, timeless, oppressed, and always Othered. Muslim women are aware of how these representations influence the ways in which they are perceived by members of the dominant population. Due to this, they are often put in a position of having to respond to these representations and, even, attempting to prove them wrong. The actual experiences of Muslim women who took part in this study varied depending on their context, their ethnicity, and their dress. While there was frustration about how they are perceived and whether they were thought of as too Muslim or not Muslim enough, the women I interviewed were not interested in changing their clothing to be more accepted in Montreal, or acceptable to members of the dominant society. However, these decisions are influenced by many factors and can change over the course of a woman's life.

The idea of Muslim dress, modesty, and Islamic identity are not static concepts and can have different definitions for Muslim women at different points in their lives. Furthermore, how women want to present themselves to the public can change depending on their comfort level, their social context, and their own preferences. What is evident through these responses is that the way these Muslim women see themselves as part of the world is extraordinarily different from how the dominant Western media and many Western citizens see them. In order to shift the perspective we need to examine how Muslim women re-define the relationship between dress and faith in their own terms.

Chapter 2:
Re-Defining the Definitions

"History is written by the victors."
-Winston Churchill

Muslim Women Written by the Victors

As discussed in the previous chapter, the dominant portrayals of Muslim women have been carefully crafted and preserved over centuries. However, these representations demarcating what it means to dress, behave, and be a Muslim woman are written by the victors, by those who benefit and win when Muslim women lose. In order to bridge the gap between the representations of Muslim women and Muslim women's self-representations, this chapter focuses on re-defining the key terms that are relevant for this study. At the beginning of the interviews, I asked my participants to define what being a Muslim woman meant to them in terms of their own life. In other words, what it means to be a practicing Muslim woman; their interest in fashion and their definitions of what constitutes modesty in dress. In doing so, my intention is to show how the rest of their everyday activities and practices can be understood in their own terms, rather than as responses contradictory to or in reaction to Western practices. In this chapter I argue that the process of creating definitions begins with a power and ability to define and to be able to realize these definitions in one's life. Furthermore, in creating definitions and labels, cultural values are utilized. In having Muslim women create and articulate their own definitions, my intent is to demonstrate their agency and the infusion of their cultural values in the making of these definitions. This is especially important during a time when Muslims are finding their way into the mainstream.

In the introduction to a special issue of *Material Religion* entitled "Popularizing Islam: Muslims and Materiality," Annelies Moors (2012) posits that the concept of "popularizing Islam" refers "to how particular practices (including scripturalist ones) become more popular, in the sense of gaining a more widespread and forceful presence" (p. 274). Islam, which is so often

portrayed in Western media as fundamentalist and strictly religious, has permeated the Western marketplace. Yet, as Moors contends, "[t]hings do not have either a religious or a secular, non-religious, status; rather, the ways in which forms become or cease to be religious may well shift in the course of their production, circulations, and consumption" (p. 276). In this respect, how "Islamic" products are, may not be determined in their creation, but through their usage. This leaves the power in the hands of the consumer to decide what their consumption means and how it operates in their lives. Since there is nothing that is inherently religious, how Muslim women define the religious in their life, what it means, and how it operates, demonstrates how meaning-making and identity construction can be powerful tools of self-identity for Muslim women living in Montreal.

Labels and Citations

There are many terms that must be taken into account and problematized while working on a project that deals with Muslim women in the West. How certain terms are employed and defined reveal embedded cultural values. Furthermore, how dominant definitions of specific terms circulate and are re-used illustrates how their popularity contributes to their installment as truths. In *Orientalism*, Said (1994) argues that "[t]he unity of the large ensemble of texts I analyze is due in part to the fact that they frequently refer to each other: Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors" (p. 23). The works that represent the Orient are constantly being re-cited and re-worked until our knowledge of such information is understood as a truth. The cultural values associated with these works enshrine the West as superior to the East.

However, in working on this project, I noticed that I was also employing terms and labels that were vague at best and problematic at worst. I realized that I was using words and concepts that were already available and trying to navigate my analysis around those terms. It became difficult to continue using these terms without justifying them, or at least expanding on my usage of them. As Said (1997) states in *Covering Islam*, labels are meant to explain "very large and complex realities" but are unfortunately "vague and at the same time unavoidable" (p. 9). When I discuss "practicing" Muslim women, "Western" dress, or "Islamic" dress, these terms only reveal how the reader understands these terms from already established perspectives that are disguised as truths. Said argues that rather than avoiding these labels, we should instead understand the cultural role they fill (1997, p. 9). Labels, he claims, have two functions, the first

is to identify and the second "is to produce a much more complex meaning" (p. 10). This second function is what needs particular focus as labeling serves as an oversimplification of multifaceted issues because labels "have behind them a whole history, enabling and disabling at the same time" (p. 10). Said claims that labels are created due to a communities of interpretation "in which things such as 'the nation' or 'Christianity' or 'Islam' are the result of agreed-upon conventions, of historical processes, and, above all, of willed human labor expended to give those things an identity we can recognize" (1997, p. 45). Ultimately, these labels need not be abandoned, but analyzed and re-defined if necessary. What is most important is that these labels are interrogated in order to understand what they reveal about our culture and to identify the victors who created them. For this project, many terms were re-defined in interviews by my participants who explained how these words relate to their lives. In doing so, the participants constructed an image for the world in which they live, where they are the victors, and definitions are defined in their own terms. This allows for a discussion of fashion and consumerism to be understood from their own standpoint, reflecting a complex of cultural, religious, and personal values, and filling particular functions in their lives.

Defining Islamic Dress

The first term that must be addressed in this study is the infamous concept of "Islamic dress." "Islamic dress" is thrown around often and this general concept somehow manages to bring up, at times both specific and yet general, images of Muslim women. The main image that comes to mind is what Shaheen (2001) identifies as "Bundles of Black" (p. 22). This image has become inextricable from the words "Muslim woman." Due to the close connection between this specific image and Islam, a Muslim woman dressed in head to toe in a wide, flowing black garment has become a standard representation of what is considered Islamic dress. However, the part of the story that is untold with such a singular understanding of Islamic dress is that it more accurately would be described as Middle Eastern cultural attire, rather than an Islamic dress. This highlights Said's argument that fairly general terms, like the "veil" or "Islamic dress," have been employed so repeatedly that their association has become entrenched and simply taken-for-granted.[8]

[8] As there are many ways of interpreting appropriate attire for Muslim women, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) featured a photo gallery on its website with different styles of dress worn by Muslim women

Two terms that have become strongly, and at times erroneously, connected with such established truths are the hijab and the burqa. Often the hijab refers to the headscarf, but can also refer more generally to forms of covering. I have opted not to use the term hijab, or the term "veil," in my analysis of my data since it is not specific enough to relate to all the pieces of clothing that the Muslim women I interviewed discussed and wore. As the national Canadian broadcaster's website (CBC) states, "[h]ijab is the noun form of the Arab verb meaning 'to cover' or 'to shelter'" (News, para. 3), and mentions how it is commonly known as the covering for the head and neck. There is no specific cultural context indicated for the hijab, yet it is certainly presented as the most ubiquitous style of covering for Muslim women. There is a sense or implication that Muslim women who do not wear this headscarf are less religious or are less concerned with modesty. My interviewees address this issue in more depth, but the critical point here is that the hijab has acquired a new meaning which is distinct from its original Arabic translation, which simply means "to cover."

Although most often worn by women in Afghanistan, the burqa has become a familiar icon in North America due to the conflicts with the Taliban following the tragic events of 9/11. Abu-Lughod (2002) describes how, in order to justify US military intervention in Afghanistan, then First Lady Laura Bush made several speeches about saving the women of Afghanistan, which served to "recreat[e] an imaginative geography of West versus East, us versus Muslims, cultures in which First Ladies give speeches versus others where women shuffle around silently in burqas" (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 784). The image of the burqa was used to represent the silence, suffering, and oppression of Afghan women and legitimize US intervention in terms of a rescue mission. The burqa; however, is specific to Afghanistan and is certainly not a style of dress that is seen all over the world, nor is it worn by every Muslim woman.

Islamic dress, then, also goes through a process of construction, and due to the way the Orientalist labels and citations have circulated, the repeated emphasis on the headscarf and burqa result in their identification as two of the most common forms of Islamic dress. Nonetheless, as mentioned previously, during political conflicts that the United States has had and continues to have with particular Middle Eastern countries, whatever style of dress is worn by women there becomes the signifier for Muslim women. Thus, depending on whatever connotations are

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around the world (CBC News, 2012). These include the burqa, the chador, the hijab, the khemar, and the niqab. Each description is accompanied by an image illustrating the garment.

associated with Muslim women, that dress becomes a symbol for those associations. These images and types of dress fix Muslim's women's identities and sartorial choices, without examining how women themselves might depart from them and employ their own interpretations in coming up with suitable attire that best suits them.

Qu'ranic Influence

While there are a variety of outfits that have widely been considered as Islamic dress, I turn now to the guidelines that influence how Muslim women decide to dress. The *Qu'ran* includes guidelines for how Muslim women should dress. I reiterate here that this dissertation is not meant to be an analysis of religious texts, nor is it meant to compare texts to other sources of religious knowledge. The reason I include quotations from the Qu'ran is to illustrate different passages to which Muslim women refer to when they discuss their choices of dress. Furthermore, these passages highlight how the guidelines are general enough that many of the different examples of Islamic dress fit within the broad descriptions. As there are many interpretations of Qu'ranic texts and hadith, there are many ways in which scholars argue how Muslim women should dress (see Mernissi, 1991). Some scholars contend that covering the hair is mandatory, while others assert that it is a cultural style. Since my interest here is in tracing the interpretations of the participants in my study, in terms of what they consider obligatory and why, my discussion of Islamic dress ensues from a cultural studies perspective.

The main sources of information for Muslims and guidelines for their lives are found in the *Qu'ran*, and the Sunnah, which documents examples of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as well as the Hadith, which is a body of literature that records what the Prophet did and said in his lifetime as observed by his contemporaries. While these guidelines are often contested because they can be interpreted and translated in a variety of ways, there is a generally accepted notion that Muslim women are asked to dress modestly. In the *Qu'ran*, there are several verses that reference Muslim women and dress. One of the most commonly cited verses is from Surah 24 an-Nur (which means "light"), verse 31:

> And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] the headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment [i.e., beauty] except that their husbands, their fathers, their

> husbands' fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers, their brother's sons, their sister's sons, their women, that which their right hand possess [i.e., slaves], 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 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. (p. 482)

Surah 33 al-Ahzab (which means "The Companies" or "The Combined Forces"), verse 59 also addresses the issue of dress:

> 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 most suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful. (p. 590)

Finally, there is a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) states how a woman should dress when she becomes an adult (i.e., after her first menstrual cycle). Jamal Badawi, an Islamic scholar, recounts this on his website, stating:

> There is a very famous saying of the Prophet known as Hadith Asma'a, and is about when Asma'a sister of Aisha (the wife of the Prophet) entered the house of the Prophet and had clothing on that was not properly concealing and when the Prophet entered and saw her he was angry and turned his face and said 'Asma'a when a woman reaches maturity it is not appropriate for her that anything of her body show except for this and that' and he pointed to his face and hands. (Badawi, n.d., para. 4)

The common thread is an emphasis on modesty and covering, but how exactly a Muslim woman will apply those guidelines in her everyday life will vary.

Although the Qu'ran does not identify any particular style or colour as the only kind of dress women should wear, the West has constructed and defined Islamic dress as consisting of black abayas, burqas, and niqabs. In their work, Sandikci and Ger (2010) also observe that while no specific style is identified in the Qu'ran or Hadiths as being required of Muslim women, they suggest there are guidelines on what to cover and how to be modest (p. 25). While there are many Muslim women who choose to dress in what is considered as stereotypically Islamic dress,

there are many other Muslim women who decide what is considered Islamic dress independent of these stereotypes.

Examples of the dynamic between Muslim women and clothing can be found in many contexts. For example, in her study of fashion in Indonesia, Carla Jones (2007) employed focus group methodologies to explore issues related to Muslim women and fashion. Jones observed that in her focus group, the definition of what is considered "Islamic" dress was "a source of polite negotiation" (p. 226). The concept of "Islamic fashion," much like Islamic dress, then, is constructed in relation to Qu'ran and Hadith, but even these texts do not specify a specific style, but rather offer guidelines on what to cover and how to be modest (Sandikci & Ger, 2010, p. 25). Sandikci and Ger's study, "Veiling in Style," focuses on tesettür fashion, a clothing style in Turkey. One of the participants in their study remarked that she found it a challenge to decide on her personal guidelines with regard to dress. The authors comment that for this participant, self-expression and self-identification were as important as expressing her faith (p. 26). Her decision was "echoed in the narratives of many others, [which] is to set her own boundaries and shape her 'personal *tesettür*'" (p. 26, italics in original). The authors argue that it is possible to wear tesettür clothing while still expressing one's individuality because of "[t]he lack of consensus of what constitutes proper *tesettür* enables [a Muslim woman] and others to develop their own, differentiated style while remaining within the new Muslim community" (p. 26).

Employing the term "Islamic dress" can be problematic as it conjures up specific images of Muslim women wearing identical black clothing, as in the identical and identity-less Muslim women in Bill Maher's Islamic fashion show. In addition, it suggests that there is one uniform that can be identified as Islamic dress, rather than a range of styles that reflect different interpretations. Much like Jones's study, the way my participants discuss Islamic dress is a polite negotiation, a discussion around a person's individual choices in line with their own particular interpretation of Islamic teachings and texts.

Fashion as a Western Enterprise

An equally general label as "Islamic dress" is "Western dress." It is perhaps even more so a general term as the Western world is made up of many different cultural influences and is constantly borrowing and reappropriating styles from around the world. Furthermore, due to an Orientalist dichotomy, the concept of Western dress relies on an interpretation of Islamic dress as

its Other. My difficulty with the term "Western dress" is that in many of the popular cultural artifacts I studied, there is an Orientalist distinction between what is considered Islamic dress and what is not, and it is always in opposition to what is considered fashionable and Western. This discussion is too simplified, especially considering the global dynamic of cycles of clothing and how they spread across the world. The scholars in the field of Islamic fashion, that I discuss below, address the issue in their research, but they also problematize it and adapt the term for their studies. However, the term "Western dress" and "Islamic dress" do have a place in my study as they are part and parcel of the representation of Muslim women. These terms are meant to highlight a stark dichotomy; unfortunately, such a simplified difference is not as useful in discussing how dress operates in the lives of Muslim women.

In creating a new definition of "Western dress" it is important to understand how it is constructed in opposition to Islamic dress. For this project, I am concerned with how "Western dress" is constructed in terms of the West as having a system of fashion, whereas Muslims are seen as having to choose clothing based solely on religious reasons. In analyzing Western dress through focusing on fashion, I argue that fashion is constantly associated solely with the West because it is often described as being "[m]arked by cycles of rapid change" (Gökariksel & Secor, 2009, p. 7). This suggests a progressive, changing, and advancing society, which is part of the West's construction of its own culture(s) in contrast to the uncivilized, stagnant and backwards East. This contrast is often used to represent fashion in Western cultures in relation to Islamic fashion. In identifying fashion as belonging to the West combined with the perception of the West as always moving forward, fashion becomes linked to modernization and symbolizes progress. Fashion, then, comes to stand in for more than clothing and style. However, it is worth bearing in mind that clothing styles that originate in the East can also be marked by rapid change, but since the stereotype of Muslim women never changes, the perception of their dress stays the same.

I use the term "Western dress" as an identification for clothing that is, at a representational level, associated with the West. Many scholars have examined how this kind of fashion is constructed in colonial contexts. Lewis (2007), for example, discusses how Western fashions, in this case fashions from Paris, were worn by "[w]omen of the Egyptian and Ottoman royal families and the progressive elites" (p. 430). She further discusses the manner in which

Muslim women in these contexts understood their consumption in relation to Orientalist stereotypes:

> Local wardrobe decisions were understood to have international ramifications. Ottomans and Egyptians were well aware that the image of the veiled harem lady was seen by the West as an indicator of the state of civilization of their entire society and took pains to counter Orientalist stereotypes, often through attention to the dressed visibility of Muslim women. (Lewis, 2007, p. 431)

In this respect, fashion that originated in the West was seen as part of a civilizing project in which Western dress recodified the Orientalist, oppressed harem figure. Civilization through consumption of Western fashions then operated as a means of defusing the "positioning the veiled body as the opposite of modernity, and by inference, of civilization" (Göle, 1996, cited in Lewis, 2007, p. 433). Ismail (2007) also discusses this phenomenon, suggesting that "the unveiled woman was an affirmation of the modern self. The invisibility—or absence—of signs of Islamicity was evidence of a modernizing society, indeed, of a civilizing one" (p. 8). These scholars demonstrate that fashion originating in the West becomes infused with colonialist discourses and values. In this respect, consumption is identified as something that could lead to modernization in a way that is seen as acceptable to the West and as oppositional to Islam.

Due to the colonial nature of what clothing that is perceived as "Western dress" signifies, Muslim women may also avoid dressing this way as a rejection of Westernization. In Jones's (2007) study of women in Indonesia, her interviewees identified "busana Muslim," to denote a style of Islamic dress as appropriate attire because it was modest and they believed the Qu'ran asked them to dress modestly. The women also expressed an aversion to wearing what they considered Western fashion and identified these styles as "corrupt, not because [they] came from some place called the 'West,' but because [they] had become the style of an older generation of Indonesian women whom they felt had embraced a secular pursuit of personal enrichment" (Jones, 2007, p. 226). In contrast to Lewis's historical study, in Jones's study, the colonial nature of the dress associated with the West became something to reject rather than embrace by a specific generation of Muslim women. This demonstrates how even general concepts like "Western dress" can be interpreted disparately by differently situated Muslim women.

The representation of clothing broadly associated with the West, may be a generalized way of understanding the concept of "Western dress," but as Said (1997) argues, we cannot

simply throw away such powerful labels. These definitions are useful as they highlight a broad dichotomy that is constantly reinforced through media and political discourses. Whether or not these terms are specific or accurate is, at times, not as important as how they serve to reinforce values. However, there are also ways in which the concept of "Western fashion" has been contested and replaced.

Western Fashion

Instead of solely looking at "Western fashion" in terms of its demarcation of an Orientalist dichotomy, several scholars have attempted to create new terms to use in its place. In Heather Marie Akou's article (2007), Western fashion is brought up in relation to studies that have attempted to problematize the term. In doing so, the tendency has been to replace the term "Western fashion" with the term "world fashion" as a more "neutral" concept (p. 406). However, Akou still finds this problematic, because "the word 'fashion' itself seems to be problematic. If something is not fashion, what is it?" (2007, p. 406). Akou comments that scholars such as Ted Polhemus, Lynn Proctor (1978), and Ered David (1992) have proposed the term "anti-fashion," but she maintains that "this still separates dress into a binary system—much like 'ethnic dress' and 'world fashion'" (2007, p. 406). Even these attempts at erasing binaries reproduce them. Regarding world fashion, "the styles to which the term refers are originally Western. So this world fashion is merely Western fashion widely distributed" (Koskennurmi-Sivonen, Koivula, Maijala, 2004, p. 450). Even problematizing the term "Western fashion" can be difficult, because the concept of Western culture in opposition to the Orient is so embedded in our language and understanding of the world.

Western dress, however, does not operate only in opposition, but also in conjunction with different fashion systems. Koskennurmi-Sivonen, Koivula, and Maijala (2004) studied Muslim women and adolescents in Finland and found that "[t]he way Muslim women and teenagers in Finland look and the way they put together their appearance reflects different fashion systems and origins of fashions" (p. 450). A large number of these Finnish women and teenagers are combining "two world fashions simultaneously in their dress" (p. 451). They do this not just by wearing Western fashions but by also wearing fashions that come from Muslim-majority countries. Many of these women wear these fashions even if they do not have a Middle Eastern ethnic background (p. 451). This demonstrates that as consumers, Muslim and non-Muslim

women are making active choices based not simply on a desire to assimilate, but also a desire to reflect their hybrid identities. Muslim women are capable of understanding their identities in complex ways, as illustrated through their dress. Western dress, then, becomes complicated in its simplicity through the active engagement of female Muslim consumers. My research focuses on the way Muslim women put together their own appearances within the specific cultural context of Montreal. While the concept of Western fashion has heuristic value, it is reconstructed here to highlight that it exists in connection with other worlds of fashion. So, while this does not eliminate the use of the label "Western fashion," my inquiry situates it within a new context that is in conjunction with and not opposition to Islamic dress.

Microcultural, Cultural, and Macrocultural

Taking this into account, many scholars have moved beyond the East vs. West binary to find new ways of approaching research on Muslim women and fashion. Akou (2007) offers David McCurdy, James Spradley, and Dianna Shandy's framework of microcultures, cultures, and macrocultures. She describes them in the following way:

> [S]treet styles and local dress practices (at the microcultural level), ethnic dress and national dress (at the cultural level), and world fashions (at the macrocultural level). This allows us to recognize multiple 'world fashion' systems associated with different macrocultures—Western, but also Islamic, African, Asian, Latino, etc… (which may or may not currently have their own world fashions, but could in the future.) (p. 408)

Akou contends that the West will always operate as a "point of reference. This is not to say that Islamic fashion is a subcategory of Western world fashion, but it is hard to get away from such a globally entrenched and imperialistic system" (2007, p. 417). In response to this, many Muslim women do not feel it necessary to conform to a Western aesthetic, but they "are aware of how people outside that macroculture view them and the importance of building a positive identity that is separate but equal to the West" (p. 417). This is a relevant way of understanding how fashion is engaged with by the Muslim women participants in this study. The street styles that Muslim women create at the microcultural level engage with both the cultural and macrocultural levels of fashion. Instead of regarding Muslim women in Montreal as precariously poised in the balance between the East and West, Akou's approach allows us to conceptualize Muslim women's engagement with the world of fashion at several levels of culture simultaneously.

Re-defining the Definitions

Thus far, I have addressed the two broad terms – Islamic dress and Western dress – in order to illustrate how dress choices can further cement the Orientalist binary, and the ways in which prevailing representations of Muslim women can influence even fashion choices Muslim women make. I feel it is important to include a discussion of specific terms that are often used in association with Muslim women but are rarely discussed publicly by Muslim women themselves; the nuances of these terms are therefore rarely acknowledged. I now move to the Muslim women who participated in my study. In each interview, I asked my participants to define what the terms "practicing," "modest dress," and "fashion" mean for them. These terms, much like Islamic and Western dress, are often thrown around when it comes to Muslim women, especially in regards to their dress, often engendering representations that belie the lived reality of Muslim women or even the idea that each Muslim woman identifies "modest dress" as having the exact same meaning and practice. For instance, one Muslim woman dresses in a way that is not stereotypically Islamic and is perceived as non-practicing, while another wearing the headscarf is considered as not interested in fashion and ultra-religious. The process of re-defining these labels allowed my participants to come up with their own definitions that reflect their own practice of what it means to be a Muslim woman.

Defining Practicing

> *I do identify myself as religious and being religious for me is being connected to my faith and to my God every single day of my life, in everything I do in my life is connected to my faith. It's connected to my goal because my goal is to go back to my God and that He is pleased with me, so everything I do it revolves around Him, to please Him. So, my work, how I interact with people, what I study, and why, what I want to do with my education, everything revolves around pleasing my God.* (Khaoula)

Oftentimes, upon learning that someone is a Muslim; the first question that person is asked is whether or not they practice their religion. The insinuation is that a Muslim lifestyle is very limiting, as though all Muslims live according to a set and prescribed standard that is not conducive to life in the West. However, in my discussions with my participants, being practicing Muslims meant that religion was part of their everyday lives but did not prohibit them from living in the West and taking part in Western culture. For most of my participants, being a

practicing Muslim was part of their everyday life and was present in their daily activities. This included praying five times a day, practicing the five pillars of Islam, and applying the ethics of Islam in their behaviour and thoughts. Being practicing was also identified by one participant as a journey during which how a person's practices may be different depending on where they are in their life.

To begin broadly and continue to the more specific responses, the most important priority in these Muslim women's lives was to believe in God and follow the Qu'ran. Rabia demonstrates that a religious lifestyle is not at odds with living in Montreal: "*à s'adapter à notre mode de vie ici, puis selon moi je me crois religieuse parce que je m'améliore de jour en jour, faire mon possible pour m'améliorer pour devenir un meilleure personne.*"[9] Remembering religion, remembering God, and being conscious of being a better person was articulated in several answers. For these women, religion was part of most of their every-day decisions: how to dress, what to eat or not eat, and how to behave. In fact, Rabia stated in her answer, her religious practices were adapted to her life in Montreal.

In her interview, Sally quoted religious studies scholar Reza Aslan, stating that religion is what she uses to explain "*what happens in the world*." Ultimately, for these Muslim women, religion is more than something they wear on their heads; it exists in fluidity with their lives, and they describe their relationship with religion in terms of how it functions in an integrated way in their daily lives. Against the stereotype that Muslim women stay at home, these Muslim women look at how religion can coexist in the life of a student or being employed. There is also agency involved here, as the Muslim women discussed what they ***do*** in their lives and how they take control of their lives even while being religious. They are making decisions about what it means to be a practicing Muslim woman in the West in relation to the Qu'ran, its teachings, and their culture, and are adapting those practices based on their own needs.

Two of my interviewees discussed religion in more cultural terms. They both raised the issue of having been born into Muslim families in Muslim-populated countries in which Islam and the local culture were intrinsically connected. Even though there are core aspects of Islam they do not participate in, they still identified, and were proud to identify, as Muslim. As my interviewee Dina said, "*The way I practice, or the way I perceive my religion is, I don't know, I*

[9] Translation: to adapt to our way of life here, and in my opinion, I believe I am religious because I improve day by day, do the best to improve myself to become a better person.

just believe that there is something that I can rely on, that I can rely on, that I can identify to." One of the religious practices these two women discussed taking part in was Ramadan, because it became a cultural practice as well as a religious one, and while taking part in it they felt like they were part of the community. They both found that when they go through tough times, they turn to their religion for comfort. However, Bouchra demonstrated that how people practice the faith may vary at different points in their lives:

> *I really want to, one day to, maybe pray, or have a discipline, 'cause I find it's important. And that's what Muslim religion for me is. I'm not, at this time in my life, when I'm ready or I want, it's not something for this, for the moment. I'm not really aiming to do it. But I know that at a moment, I would like to be much more disciplined and praying every day for myself.*

Defining religious practice and religious identity in the exact same way for all Muslim women erases the decision-making, choices, negotiations, and thought that Muslim women take into account while living their lives. It also negates the way that these definitions can change for an individual Muslim woman over the course of her life. Finally, these religious definitions speak more to spirituality, behaviour, consciousness, and internal decisions rather than the external decision to wear or not wear a headscarf.

Defining Modest Dress

> *Le hijab, c'est pas juste un foulard sur la tête, c'est toute une façon de s'habiller.* (Yousra)[10]

A key term that emerged during my interviews was what it meant to dress modestly and what constitutes modest dress. Modest dress is a particularly important topic, specifically since, as previously mentioned, what is asked of Muslim women is open to interpretation. Since there are contesting schools of thought about what a Muslim woman should wear, how Muslim women explain modest dress demonstrates what they understand as being required of them and how they practice those requirements. Defining these terms breaks down how Muslim women view modest dress and how they come to make decisions regarding their manner of dress. Furthermore, the discussion of modest dress becomes relevant in the discussion about

[10] Translation: The Hijab is not just a headscarf, it's a whole way of dressing.

consumption, as these Muslim women's modesty guidelines influence how they shop and how they adapt the clothing that is available to them in the Western market-place.

Many of the Muslim women I spoke with identified broad guidelines for modest dress. Yousra identified the following three criteria: long, loose, and non-transparent clothing. Many other participants concurred with this. For many of the Muslim women I spoke with, modest dress included covering their hair with a headscarf. Sally discussed the broadness of the guidelines, stating that these are derived from a specific social context, but that "[*their] message is eternal and it can be appropriated in different context. I think that's the underlying theme where it's modesty. Now modesty, I think, is something I think it means different things to different people, right?*"

Khadija discussed what she noticed about modesty in her travels to three Muslim-majority countries: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco. In the mass media, these three countries are portrayed as being similar due to the Orientalist portrayals of North Africa and the Middle East as being equivalent to one homogenous region (see Said, 1994); however, from her perspective, these regions varied widely in how dress and modesty were discussed and enacted. She also argued that there were differences in how modesty is observed in Western countries like France and Canada. In her words:

> *Donc, ça dépend, c'est vraiment relative de la mentalité, et si tu vois quelqu'un de modeste, mis à part la religion, ici dans la mentalité canadienne, si on parle de modestie, c'est différent que si tu en parles en France, c'est différent, c'est la même chose chez nous, c'est la même chose. La modestie au Maroc c'est différent. C'est pour ça que Dieu, lui, il a fait les, les grands lignes de ce que la femme doit, ne doit pas faire, paraître, et ce qui à l'intérieure de ces lignes de ce cadre chacun va le prendre de sa manière à partir de sa culture, à partir de sa mentalité, de son environnement, etc., d'une façon de vivre. Donc, oui, le Coran, donc c'est clair et net dans le Coran que la femme doit être modeste, elle doit s'habiller d'une certaine manière, donc, c'est ça, et la façon de s'habiller, comme je t'ai dit, ça dépend de là où tu es.* (Khadija)[11]

[11] Translation: So, it depends, it really is relative to the mentality, and if you see someone modest, aside from religion, here in the Canadian mentality, if we talk about modesty, it's different than if you speak in France, it's different, it's the same with us, it's the same thing. Modesty in Morocco is different. That is why God, He, He made broad lines that women should, should not, appear, and what is inside these lines of the framework, each will take his or her way from his/her culture, from their mentality, from their environment, etc., of a way of life. So, yes, the Qu'ran, so it is crystal clear in the Qu'ran women have to be modest, she has to dress in a certain way, so, that's it, and the way to dress, like I said, it depends on where you are.

She identified that individuals adapt the broad guidelines concerning modest dressing depending on their culture, individual preferences and ideas about modesty, their environment, and the practical aspects of their daily life. The concept of a specific material or style as a required uniform for Muslim women ignores the fact that Muslim women are making decisions about dress specific to their own lives within these broad guidelines. However, as interviewee Wurood stated, non-Muslims have specific ideas about what constitutes Islamic dress, including the abaya, and yet the latter is actually, as previously mentioned, a cultural dress specific to particular regions. There are some within the Muslim community who do not wear "Western" dress, but this is not a perspective she shares as a Muslim woman who grew up in Denmark.

> *I know sisters who, who actually refuse to buy their clothes from those kind of shops because the whole idea of you shouldn't imitate Western society, or whatever, you know. But I think personally, I'm like, I am Western society. I'm not, I'm not imitating it.*
> (Yasmin)

For her, as for many Muslim women, dressing modestly in line with Islamic guidelines means she can wear clothing from anywhere in the world; she is not required to wear a specific cultural dress to be modest. Also, her point that her practices are not incompatible with the West overlooks the fact that she identifies with the West, since it is where she grew up. In her view, her Islamic identity and her "Western" or European identity are one and the same

Dina, who grew up in Morocco and chooses not to dress according to the modesty guidelines specified at the beginning of this section, stated that her dress changes depending on whether she is in Montreal and Morocco, with safety concerns being the primary reason:

> *When you compare Montreal and Morocco let's say in summer here I would say I won't even think about is it super short or not. But in Morocco you will consider that because of safety reasons, because sometimes you will go out at night and be wearing something short you want people, you don't want people to look at you want to be like and judge you while not even knowing you. So you just rather stay, I wouldn't say modest, I would say discreet, you know*.

For Dina, the dress that she wears is largely influenced by cultural expectations of the site in which she is located rather than her personal connection with Islam. In this case, where she is in the world influences how modestly she dresses, because of how others will react to her standard of modesty. Therefore, what is considered appropriate in a Montreal context may be considered

too sexual in Morocco. In this case, safety becomes a key issue that influences dress practices, rather than personal religious beliefs.

However, Khaoula felt differently, in that the emphasis on sexualized appearance informed her choices when it came to modesty. For example, she said that in a Montreal context where sexuality is portrayed everywhere, including on posters, covering herself is a way for her to show that she is "*a human being, that [she's] not just a sexual object*"; she is proud of how she dresses because she is "*protecting [her] dignity*." She still maintains her modesty guidelines in this context, even though ideals about sexuality may be more lax in Montreal than in other places. In a context that is focused on looks and sexuality, she wants to be judged based on her "*personality and what [she] say[s], and not by how, what [she] look[s] like*." Jasmine echoed this sentiment stating that the point of being modest is to avoid being treated as an object.

Along with a discussion on the expression of modesty, there was also a discussion of modesty in an internal sense as expressed through one's behaviour, rather than simply modesty as reflected in one's outward appearance. As Kenza stated, "*You could look modest, but not act modest*." Yasmin stated that modesty was "*about being humble. It's about a sense of humility, sense of modesty, the way you are with other people, not having arrogance, not believing you're better looking or [a] better person than other people*." For these participants, there was a strong emphasis on a person's behaviour, much like how they responded to representations in media. They were not interested in changing their dress in order to respond to representations and prove them wrong; instead they chose to disprove those representations through their actions, behaviour, and education. For many of these women, modesty was related to how a person behaves, and without modest behaviour, modest dress did not mean anything. Hence, for these Muslim women, the meaning of dress was constructed through the person's overall actions, not only how their body looks.

> *Islamic dress is a completely personal thing. Of course, there are guidelines as Muslims we should follow, just as any religion has certain guidelines that people should be following, but I think that people choose their level of practice or their level of appreciation or understanding or whatever of their religion, and I think it's a very personal thing.* (Fatma Nurmohamed)

Finally, there were a few women who discussed their modest dress in relation to other women and other Muslim women. In one interview, Sorouja mentioned that dressing modestly

was a way of not showing off and thus offending or making other women feel badly about themselves. Sally stated that ultimately, dress was personal and people should not be judging others. While there is a belief in Western society that dressing the way many Muslim women dress is oppressive or that the Muslim women are inferior within their own religion, Mrouj rejected this sentiment, stating: "*I'm confident, I'm confident to be like this and I feel that I'm the same, on the same level*."

Defining Fashion

> *On fashion:*
> *I don't, like, follow it religiously or anything.* (Wurood)

I included fashion as a term for the Muslim women to define during the interviews because of the perspective that fashion and Islam are seemingly mutually exclusive terms. As mentioned in the introduction, the idea of a fashionable Muslim is associated with assimilation or exoticization. The question, then, is what does fashion mean to these Muslim women? There were a variety of responses, and fashion occupied a different role in the life of each of these Muslim women. For many, fashion was seen as an industry, including what we see on runways in Paris and Milan and other fashion capitals in the world. As Marie stated, "*Fashion was what you see in magazines, what other people decide what is fashionable and what you should wear for the summer season and fall season*." A few women mentioned that fashion is associated with trends that occur at specific times that are introduced and made popular by a larger fashion industry.

Some women qualified this response by saying they were interested in fashion, but they satisfy this interest by reading blogs with Muslim women showcasing different styles while wearing the headscarf and dressing modestly. Reem said that she finds inspiration on Muslim women's blogs and on Instagram for her own style, because at first she found it hard to follow trends and be fashionable while dressing modestly and these blogs were helpful. Sorouja said she follows the trends by taking the colours that are "in" every season and incorporating them into her outfits.

Many Muslim women spoke about how fashion is actually a personal choice and while they had an interest in what is considered "in style," they also have their own personal aesthetic preferences. Yasmin stated,

> *I like nice looking dress, like clothes, and I think it's a particular, particular style that I, myself, enjoy. So, some things that are in "fashion" I would like and other things I don't like because I think it's just because they're seen as trendy that this is seen as beautiful clothes, but they're actually not that good looking. So I think it's a very personal, like, my own personal aesthetic. And I'm more moved by that, or at least I try to be, than what fashion magazines tell me that this is trendy and this is "fashionable."*

Many of my participants discussed their personal approach to fashion, what they enjoy wearing and why. The idea of fashion as part of identity construction was discussed by many of the participants who saw it as a way to present their individuality through their clothing. Khaoula remarked that to her, "*Fashion means that I can express my taste, express, 'cause I feel like, the way you dress is, kind of describes your personality*." She identified herself as "feminine," which she expresses through the fabrics and colours she chooses. Zineb mentioned she enjoys adding original and unique touches to her outfits. Arij discussed how she was lucky enough to be part of a social class that allowed her to enjoy consumerism and fashion. She was quite interested in fashion and enjoys colours and being up to date with styles. She stated that simply because someone wears the headscarf does not mean she has to be "*laide ou être mal habillée.*"[12] Fashion, for many of these Muslim women, is about personal style and expressing one's individuality, two items that are not typically associated with Muslim women.

The topic of cultural context was again introduced in this section. Bouchra commented that her interest in following trends differs depending on where she is geographically. For example, when she is in Paris, she finds she is more conscious of dressing in line with the dominant styles than when she is in Montreal. In Montreal, if she does not enjoy a trend, she does not feel pressure to conform to it. This reflects the idea of dressing differently in Morocco than in Montreal, but instead of safety concerns, in this case it is purely stylistic in reason.

Conclusion: Definitions Re-Defined

I began this chapter by citing Edward Said and how terms can often be vague and used as shorthand to communicate deeply held ideological values. In the case of terms related to Muslim women and Islamic fashion, these terms can be detrimental to Muslim women. However, as Said argues, we should not disregard these labels altogether as they can still serve a purpose. In

[12] Translation: ugly or poorly dressed.

this study, defining these terms allows for an understanding of the landscape that has been defined for Muslim women and how simple words like "veil," "Islamic dress," "Western dress," and "practicing," can create one-dimensional images while obscuring complex histories.

In charting Muslim women's redefinitions of these terms, my intent is to recreate the playing field. What is most important to reveal about the definitions is not simply that they are diverse and that not all Muslim women define their lives the same way, but rather, that these definitions or redefinitions are fluid, resonating with the interpretative framework the women utilize and the particular milieu in which they are situated. Many of these Muslim women discuss a process wherein they anticipate feeling differently about certain terms at different points in their lives. Their definitions can change given how they feel about their religion and where they find themselves in their internal spiritual journey. Their definitions also change given the geographic location and cultural context which they inhabit. Sometimes these changes are due to safety precautions, aesthetic preferences, or as a means to distance oneself from cultural practices that are perceived as detrimental.

Finally, and what is specific to this study, is the way in which one participant discussed Western dress as being an integral part of her identity, since she was raised in the West, and that it is not something that is inherently oppositional to her being a Muslim woman. What she demonstrates is a common thread that runs through many of these interviews, namely that meaning is derived from the choices that the women make; it is not inherent in any object. Hence, this demonstrates the agency of Muslim women in terms of how they choose to interpret, define, and engage with particular objects of clothing against a backdrop which portrays them as passive subjects, contained within the strictures of culture and tradition.

Chapter 3:
Muslim Women and the World of Fashion

"they escaped it without leaving it"
-Michel de Certeau, ***The Practice of Everyday Life***

Re-defining the definitions related to Muslim women, fashion, and Islam, serves to demonstrate how Muslim women feel about how they are represented in the dominant media and how they understand their relationship to the world. However, the world does not take Muslim women's' definitions into account and respond to them. In fact, simply understanding how Muslim women describe their definitions is only a small part of a larger picture about how Muslim women engage with the Montreal culture. I now move from how Muslim women see and think of themselves in the world to how they actively engage and participate in Montreal. As discussed in the previous chapter, many Muslim women have specific guidelines when it comes to how they dress modestly. In the current Montreal market, these guidelines are difficult to fulfill. This begs the question of how Muslim women choose to dress themselves if they live in a market where the available clothes and styles do not satisfy these guidelines? In order to address this question, this chapter focuses on the theoretical approach I employed to analyze how my participants discussed their everyday practices in Montreal.

I open this chapter with a quote from Michel de Certeau's (1988) work *The Practice of Everyday Life*: "they escaped it without leaving it" (p. xiii). Here, de Certeau is referring to the colonization of the "new world" and the ways in which the indigenous peoples found their way around their occupation. They were able to navigate around colonial powers by "subvert[ing] them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept" (1988, p. xiii). He claims that the "[p]rocedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing" (1988, p. 32). Even though someone else was in control of the space, through their processes of consumption the colonized are able to resist the colonizer's imposed organization. Since many of the practices defined in the previous chapter seem to be incongruent with the

Montreal culture, using de Certeau's theoretical framework allows me to demonstrate the manner in which Muslim women in Montreal escape Montreal expectations of fashion without leaving it, and in fact, seemingly embracing it. I argue that there is a Western fashion system that exists and that taking part in the consumer market does not solely imply an immediate acceptance of such a system.

Roland Barthes's Fashion System

Before addressing de Certeau's work, I will first outline Roland Barthes' work as a way to approach the fashion system in Montreal. In thinking of how strategies and tactics could operate specifically in relation to fashion, and to unpack what it means to be "proper," what it means to be the institution, especially when discussing something as wide and broad as the Western fashion system, I explore the way in which fashion operates as a system with its own rules, instead of a world purely derived of creativity. This demonstrates how understanding fashion is critical to appreciating how it works within culture. By discussing the rules and values of fashion, we can apprehend the ways that consumers engage with fashion, and how they respond to a highly structured system.

In *The Language of Fashion,* Barthes (2006) explains that "fashion is indeed a system" (p. 100). He continues that though this may seem a contradiction as fashion is perhaps understood as resulting from a more artistic and creative expression, he contends that it is actually a well-structured system composed of its own rules: "fashion is strongly coded" he maintains (p. 100). While fashion may seem, or be constructed, as an unending stream of possibilities, fashion, according to Barthes, is actually made up of "a finite reserve of elements and certain rules of change" as well as its "own rules and limits, like grammar. These are purely formal rules" (p. 100). He explains that rules can include how certain articles of clothing can be combined to make an outfit; however, there are also rules regarding items which cannot. Finally, he claims that the only reason fashion may seem "unpredictable" is a result of "using only a small human memory" (p. 100) because understanding the history of fashion illustrates that it is "very marked [by] regularity" (p. 101).

Barthes here demonstrates the contradictions in understanding fashion as a dynamic, ever-changing system, and instead as one marked by regularity. In contrast, Joanne Entwistle (2000) argues that, "fashion emerges in societies which have some social mobility rather than a

fixed and stable class structure" (p. 82). She further asserts that "[f]ashion thrives in a world of social mobility, a dynamic world characterized by class and political conflict, urbanization and aesthetic innovation" (p. 105). Fashion, then, seems to be connected to the concept of change, of advancement, and of unpredictability. Marking fashion in this way then creates an illusion of the fashion system as one of irregularity, creativity, and unruliness. However, as Barthes writes, the fashion system is much more structured than that.

Dress and Dressing

In order to discuss this system, Barthes employs a semiotic analysis, identifying two parts of this system, "dress" and "dressing." These two concepts are based on Saussure's concepts of "langue" and "parole." "Langue" is the proper language with rules and grammar, whereas "parole" refers to the speech act – the quotidian way that individuals take language and adapt it in their own parlance. Barthes' applies these two concepts to fashion. The first of these two elements is "dress" which Barthes describes as the "institutional, fundamentally social, reality, which, independent of the individual, is like the systematic, normative reserve from which the individual draws their own clothing, and which, in correspondence to Saussure's *langue*, we propose to call *dress*" (Barthes, 2006, p. 8, emphasis in original). Dress, then, is the system that is constructed as part of the institution, or as Barthes states "the proper object of sociological and historical research" (p.9). It is from "dress" that individuals decide and choose their own wardrobe. This system is, as Barthes states, a "normative reserve" that is created for the consumer, but detached from the consumer. This normative reserve affords the concept image of what dress *is*, what it looks like, and how it should be worn. It includes the rules and grammar that Barthes discusses in relation to the fashion system.

If dress is constructed as the norm, the authority, or a normative reserve, then it is from this norm that individuals understand their own practices of their own performance of "dressing." Dressing, according to Barthes, is "distinguish[ed] from a second, individual reality, the very act of 'getting dressed', in which the individual actualizes on their body the general inscription of dress, and which corresponding to Saussure's *parole*, we will call *dressing*" (Barthes, 2006, pp. 8-9, italics in original). Barthes further describes dressing as "the personal mode with which the wearer adopts (albeit badly) the dress that is proposed to them by their social groups" (p.9). Dressing, then, reflects the agency of the consumer and whether or not they use fashion the way

it is intended to "dress." Dressing demonstrates that dress is not only a top down operation where individuals directly reflect what they are given from the normative reserve; rather, it is reflective of their choice and ability.

Together, the concepts of dress and dressing serve to create "clothing" which corresponds to "language" in Saussure's theory (Barthes, 2006, p. 9). These two concepts operate in "a dialectical exchange" (p. 9). Barthes also argues that what is considered "dressing" can soon become considered "dress" as long as it follows several conditions. This means that the flow is not only from dress to dressing, but dressing can also become dress. He gives the example of wearing a coat over the shoulders without placing one's arms through the sleeves or when several buttons on a shirt are not buttoned. These practices may begin as part of dressing but become part of dress when "a community makes it into a distinctive mark imposed on its members" and the second item is when "the manufacturer provides the coats with internal straps for the arms with which to support the coat without rolling the sleeves up" (p. 10). The first step is meant to reflect the development of the practice into a trend that is somewhat widely adopted. The style becomes a specific fashion practice of a group. The second step is when it becomes adopted by the fashion system itself, not only its consumers. This means that fashion houses and labels create the clothing in order to enable consumers to wear this same trend and adopt it without having to adapt their own clothing. It becomes part of the grammar of fashion and it becomes a part of the normative reserve. Thus, there is an interaction between dress and dressing that operates both ways. The purpose here is to demonstrate the manner in which dress and dressing operate in conjunction with one another and that neither serves as a closed system of dress.

Both dress and dressing are important to this study as they demonstrate the connectivity of culture and the role of the individual within institutions or structures. Barthes argues; however, that "Dressing is a weak form of meaning, it expresses more than it notifies; dress on the contrary is a strong form of meaning it constitutes an intellectual, notifying relation between the wearer and their group" (2006, p. 10). Barthes's theory is similar to de Certeau's analysis of "strategies" and "tactics" in many ways, but specifically in how the tactic as being an "art of the weak," may work to subvert and alter the normative rules and regulations prescribing particular behaviours or clothing. Barthes' notion of "dressing" corresponds to the tactic, as a weak form of meaning. While Barthes's theory is important to discuss in relation to the institution and use of

fashion in the West, I now take up de Certeau's theory to demonstrate how it can be employed in a postcolonial context, and its more explicit relevance to issues of marginality and the absence of power.

de Certeau's Strategies and Tactics

In his work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1988) discusses the way a culture is made up of systems of operational combinations and permutations that come together to make up culture and how individuals use those systems (pp. xi-xii). Much like the representation of Muslim women in Western media serving as a biased, inaccurate portrayal of the real material realities of Muslim women, de Certeau argues that

> [t]he presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularizers as the key to socioeconomic advancement) tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of utilization. (p. xiii)

In order to discuss the practices Muslim women take part in, it is important to discuss the systems of operational combination with which they engage. Much like the example de Certeau gives of the colonized subverting colonial power, Muslim women living in Canada are able to escape the systems that are imposed on their environments without actually leaving them.

Strategies

As mentioned in the previous chapter, labels are vague and unreliable. This is certainly the challenge when deciding and articulating what defines de Certeau's notion of "strategy" vis-à-vis the Western consumer market. In order to make such a label as specific as possible, it is important to focus on the main point of what constitutes a "strategy" and flesh out its rationale. De Certeau argues that "[a] strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clientèles,' targets,' or 'objects' of research)" (1988, p. xix, italics in original). The "proper" here is what is considered legitimate, institutionalized, and has a position of power. The power here comes from having, as de Certeau states, "a *place* that can be

delimited as its *own*" (p. 36, italics in original). The power dynamic is particularly important in the discussion of strategies in relation to colonialism.

Strategy, then, is related to a spatial dimension. Here, de Certeau's offers the example of indigenous peoples colonized by Spain observing how their "[p]rocedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing" (1988, p. 32). De Certeau outlines three points for the operation of a strategy: First, that strategy is "*a triumph of place over time*" (1988, p. 36, emphasis in original). By creating a space, there is an ability to "capitalize acquired advantages, to prepare future expansions, and thus to give oneself a certain independence with respect to the variability of circumstances" (p. 36). The second is that occupying a physical space allows for a "*panoptic practice*" (p. 36, emphasis in original), where individuals can be observed and made accountable in their daily activities (p. 36). Finally, strategy's power relation is attached to its spatiality because of "the power to provide oneself with one's own place" (1988, p. 36). The difficulty in determining a strategy given these specific characteristics lies in how engrained they are in culture. Despite their visibility, which is what gives them their power, they are also invisible as they become so normative in our daily practices. This is why de Certeau argues that it is important to make strategies explicit (p. xi).

Tactics

If the strategy is made by the powerful and operates through space, then the tactic is created by those without power and operates through time. According to de Certeau, a tactic "is determined by the *absence of power*" (1988, p. 38, emphasis in original) and is "an art of the weak" (p. 37). Tactics, then, are created in response to an imposed strategy without, as de Certeau makes clear in his example of Spanish colonialism, leaving it. The tactic is a way to negotiate and navigate a space without overthrowing, disregarding and ignoring rules, or dislodging the position of the strategy. In this respect, "[t]he space of a tactic is the space of the other" (p. 37). De Certeau defines the tactic as "the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices" (p. xvii). Here de Certeau demonstrates how creativity is an integral aspect of the tactic.

Unlike the strategy which is related to space, the tactic "depends on time" (p. xix). The tactic "must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'" (p. xix). The tactic requires the consumer to "accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the

wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment" (1988, p. 37). Therefore, tactics must always be changing and readjusting to and utilizing what is available.

The Wig and the Walker

De Certeau offers two examples to highlight the subversive nature of tactics: "la perruque," or "the wig" in literal translation (p. 25), and the walker (p.98). He describes la perruque as "the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer" (p. 25). He gives many examples of how this functions, one is when a worker uses material and machinery at the workplace in order to create something "precisely not directed toward profit" (1988, p. 25) and for his/her own use. He provides several examples of the perruque, including a secretary using time at work to "writ[e] a love letter" (p. 25) or using scrap material, otherwise left unused, to employ their own creativity (p. 25). De Certeau distinguishes between the use of goods, which are not stolen, but instead, for the perruque constitute a "diver[sion] [of] time" (p. 25).

De Certeau's example of the walker illustrates how tactics emerge in response to strategies that are imposed in a given urban environment, where the strategy consists of the urban planning that orients the walker to follow a particular direction. The strategy creates a path to follow through the city, but "the walker actualizes some of these possibilities" (1988, p. 98). As the walker makes their way through these strategies, "he [sic] also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements" (1988, p. 98). The walker does not leave the city, but learns how to engage and reinvent the city through their own practices. De Certeau refers to these navigations and negotiations as "ways of operating" (p. xiv). These include the ways in "which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production" (1988, p. xiv). The tactic becomes a means of not leaving a space, but reinventing it to work within a person's own needs, practices, and beliefs.

As is demonstrated through de Certeau's example of Spanish colonialism, the "strategies" and "tactics" framework can be applied to a postcolonial context. In her article titled "Pedagogies of Hope," Jiwani (2011) employs de Certeau's concept of "making do" and "strategies and tactics" in order to "highlight the different ways in which the story of colonialism and its various manifestations of exclusions and marginalization, and stigmatization has been

recrafted and retold, and the new vantage points from which these retellings have been launched" (p. 334). Jiwani argues that

> [If] "making do" is a way in which those who are powerless or marginalized design, initiate, and launch interventions, then we need to pay heed to the ground on which such interventions are formulated. In other words, "making do" involves utilizing those tactical materials that subjugated groups and individuals have access to in order to launch their tactics of resistance whether these be contestatory claims of truth-telling, subversions of dominant narratives, or articulations of counter narratives. (2011, p. 335)

As Muslim women are working against a well-established landscape of representation in which they are portrayed in a stereotypical fashion, their navigations in and around these ideologies demonstrates ways of "making do," their way of dealing with a position of powerlessness and marginalization. This research specifically deals with how such navigations exist within the consumer sphere, as the clothing available within the Montreal market is more than often outside of guidelines for many Muslim women. Where Barthes' analysis of "dress" and "dressing" follows the langue/parole model (langue being the institutional framework and parole being the articulation of it in a given space and time), de Certeau's strategies and tactics follow a similar framework, where strategy would refer to the institution, and tactics, the enunciatory articulation. Nevertheless, de Certeau's framework emphasizes power relations and underscores the agency of marginalized groups. However, much like Barthes' analysis of the relationship between "dress" and "dressing," Jeremy Ahearne (1995) suggests that:

> "Strategies" and "tactics" cannot necessarily be set against each other as opposing forces in a clearly defined zone of combat. Rather, as Certeau presents them, they enable us as concepts to discern a number of heterogeneous movements across different distributions of power. (p. 163)

In order to discuss how the strategies and tactics operate in the specific context of this study, we must first establish what is considered the Western fashion system and how it operates as a strategy that Muslim women, then, respond to with their tactics.

Strategies, Tactics, Consumption

De Certeau's and Barthes's works have been applied by scholars focusing on consumption theory by looking at not only where people shop and what they purchase, but also in looking at what people do with the products they consume, how they adapt them, and how

they change them. This builds on the concept of the "circuit of culture," in which representation, consumption, production, regulation, and identity are all taken into account when studying the process of consumption (Leve, 2012, p. 4). This view of fashion also relates to the decommoditization end of the process of consumption, in which consumers express agency in making their own choices that may not necessarily be in line with the intended usage of a product. In consumption theory, several scholars (du Gay et. al., 1997; Scanlon, 2000; Featherstone, 2007; Sassatelli, 2007) have analyzed the de-commoditization end of the consumer cycle. Jennifer Scanlon (2000) argues that:

> [f]or too long, historians of consumer culture regarded the consumer process as one comprised of perpetrators and victims. Capitalists, in this version of history, seem to control not only the means of production but also the minds of consumers; we, the consumers, act unwittingly and well. This analysis appeals to many people but fails to attribute agency to the people who consume. The process of consumption is truly a process rather than simply an act, a process involving people who continually make choices. (p. 6)

As Scanlon demonstrates, here, the agency involved in making decisions about and throughout consumption is often erased from the process and the analysis of consumption. This is similar to the ways in which the dominant media erase Muslim women's agency.

Further, not only are consumers in control of their consumption practices, but also, they do not always understand their purchases in the "intended" way. Michael Featherstone (2007) contends that commodities have "sign value" and that through their usage "they can become de-commodified and receive a symbolic charge (over and above the intended by the advertisers) which makes them sacred to their users" (p. 121). This perspective focuses, not only on how commodities are encoded in particular ways and how they are apprehended or consumed through their purchase, but also the manner in which these products and their meanings are constantly renegotiated and reappropriated even after their purchase (see Stuart Hall, 1980). This occurs at the level of symbolic meaning-making, as well as in terms of how products are used differently than intended. Du Gay et al. (1997) argue that this "third way" of understanding consumption analyzes "what individuals and groups make of and do with the objects they consume. In other words, this approach attempts to analyse how objects are made meaningful in the process of their consumption" (p. 102). This perspective connects to the notion of "tactics" as defined by de Certeau as it focuses on what consumers do with what is available and how they make meanings

that may not be in line with what was intended. Therefore, the sign value is not fixed, but is altered depending on what the consumer brings to the experience through their own values, ideologies, and practical needs.

In *Doing Cultural Studies*, du Gay et al., (1997) outline several different perspectives by which to understand the practice of consumption. The first of these focuses on the critique of the Frankfurt School, especially Max Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's work on the "production of consumption." The authors criticize this perspective, which they argue, emphasizes a more elitist notion of culture – as high culture – "possessing connotations of refinement, learning and aesthetic contemplation" which are corrupted by industry (p. 87). Consumption, within this framework, then, defines consumers purchasing and consuming products from a "standardized, homogenized 'mass culture' in which the market consumes everything of value in its path" (p. 87). Du Gay et al. argue that:

> In this process, citizens are turned into a passive mass of consumers, while culture ceases to stand in a critical relation to everyday life and becomes reduced to banal mass entertainment and amusement aimed at the lowest common denominator. In this world of mass culture, all is false and inauthentic because it is tainted by the hand of production, commodification and exchange. (p. 87)

As du Gay et. al.'s critique asserts, the needs and wants of consumers are said to be created by producers and the concept of mass culture as being superficial suggests that an "object has an 'essential' meaning determined by its commodified form" (pp. 87-88). As Featherstone (2007) argues, commodities have a "sign value" that is attributed to them rather than an essential and fixed meaning that is inherent to them, as suggested by Horkheimer and Adorno. Overall, this approach to consumption attributes all the power to the production end of consumption and imagines consumers as simply diligently following trends to their own detriment.

A second perspective on consumption that du Gay et al., identify draws from the works of Thorstein Veblen and Pierre Bourdieu. Here, the focus is on consumption as it relates to social class and social differentiation. Veblen, they note, examined how the leisure class used their consumption styles and products in order to define themselves as different and separate from other classes who were driven by basic needs and whose products of consumption were of a different order. Nonetheless, they maintain that "no matter how ostensibly poor people might be,

their consumption practices always tend to have 'identity' value and not simply 'use' value" (du Gay et. al., 1997, p. 96). They connect this to Pierre Bourdieu's work.

Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical approach hinges on how one's identity in the social environment is constructed primarily by differentiation (p. 167). Du Gay et al., outline how Bourdieu argues that "consumption is at one and the same time a material and a symbolic activity" (p. 97). However, their critique of Bourdieu centers on his main focus on class as social differentiation, while not taking into account other relevant factors including gender, race, and age categories (1997, p. 98). To support their critique, they cite Michel de Certeau who argues that Bourdieu's analysis "is largely based upon the mapping of differences between goods onto differences between social groups" and the problem is in the way that social groups are constructed in this approach. They argue that in Bourdieu's analytical framework, social groups "are treated as prior social divisions unaltered by these processes of consumption, people become unilaterally trapped in positions from which they are unable to extricate themselves" (p. 98). This places consumers into specific groups with specific labels and practices attached to them. In this way, the diversity within social groups is flattened. Ultimately, this theoretical approach, does not take into account the fluidity of movement by individuals across groups or their multiple positioning in several groups simultaneously. This is an important consideration for my study as simply because my participants have been chosen solely because they identify as Muslim women, it is important to flesh out that their decision-making process does not only take this factor into account. While religion can be an important factor, there are other concerns and aspects of their identity that their consumption satisfies.

The final perspective on consumption the authors focus on, which is particularly important to this study, is consumption as appropriation and resistance (du Gay et. al., 1997, p.102). They identify that this "third way" operates mainly "through observing people 'in action', deploying what is known of and what they do with the objects they consume. In other words, this approach attempts to analyse how objects are made meaningful in the processes of consumption" (p. 102). This perspective borrows from de Certeau's work as

> He describes consumption as a productive activity because it leaves neither the person engaged in it, the object(s) involved, nor the sphere of production untouched. He argues that the meanings attached to—or coded into—objects in the act of their initial production are never automatically folded into the psychic life of those at whom they are aimed. Meaning, he argues, is also produced by consumers through

> the use to which they put those objects in the practice of their everyday lives. So while the 'elements' used may be determined in the sphere of production, how those are used—to what ends and with what effects—cannot be so easily pre-established. (1997, p. 103)

This process of meaning-making at the consumption end of the cycle also impacts on the production end as well. Producers will also observe and listen to consumers' impressions and practices of use with regard to their products. They take into consideration how consumers are adapting products and how they make meaning of and with them, and adjust their products accordingly (p.103). Through this process "the meanings that products come to have are constructed in this process of *dialogue*—albeit rarely an equal one in terms of power relations—between production and consumption" (du Gay et al., p. 103, italics in original). They note that a power dynamic is present in this relationship, so it is not an entirely neutral process of fluidity; rather, there is a connection and flexibility between how producers will construct meaning, which is not entirely disconnected from the consumers. Again, I want to connect this to the relationship between "strategies" and "tactics," and "dress" and "dressing," as the relationships are not separated, they in fact, rely on each other.

Finally, utilizing the work of subcultural theorists, du Gay et al., discuss consumption as resistance. Alienable objects can be transformed into inalienable objects (1997, p.97). The product is considered alienable due to its connection to capitalism – made in the factory by alienated labour; it becomes inalienable when it becomes "an apparent symbol of estrangement (alienation at work) to being an artefact which symbolizes identity and 'belongingness' (as part of the culture of that group)" (p. 97). This demonstrates how symbolically the way products are used can acquire specific meanings that reflect group identity while also expressing or symbolizing a rejection of the capitalistic system. By thinking about consumption through appropriation and resistance, the role of the consumer is more active and less dependent on how producers impose and determine meanings. In many ways, consumers' meaning-making process can actually influence other consumers, and also equally influence producers.

Neoliberalism

Up until now in this chapter, I have discussed the theoretical approach I have employed in this study and how it relates to consumerism. Here it is important to address the concept neoliberalism as an equally important term to define as this study is particularly situated within

the growing neoliberal environment that is engulfing everything from the market, to politics and culture. In the chapter, "Understanding Neoliberalism," Raewyn Connell (2010) suggests that the term "'Neoliberalism' broadly means the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market that has come to dominate global politics in the last quarter-century" (p. 22). The concept of the "free market" is at the center of neoliberalism, but in addition, Connell claims that neoliberalism aims to constantly grow and create markets (p. 23). Ultimately, this is more than a process of deregulation, but actually becomes "a strategy of the endless commodification of services" (p. 23). This serves to make consumerism a dominant function in society, normalizing it even outside of the traditional consumer sphere. As a result, consumption becomes "a social good" (p. 27). Consumption becomes a duty and the market takes on the role of truth. As Connell states the market is the sole standard for what counts as truth (p. 27). The market, then, becomes a source of cultural values. Products sold and purchased in the free market take on an ideological role.

Due to the ubiquitous nature of neoliberalism, and the long reach the free market has on culture, individuals will begin to feel a sense of freedom within the neoliberal context "which may turn into positive belief in the new system" (Connell, 2010, p. 28). Unlike the discussion around consumption, the articulation of this specific neoliberal context is important to demonstrate that consumption does not only exist when a consumer walks into a store.

To take up the discussion of neoliberalism in the context of race, I refer to the article "Race, Migration and Neoliberalism," where Sally Davison and George Shire (2015) argue that neoliberalism

> is deeply embedded in the histories and practices of racism. The operations of the market are always underpinned by unequal power structures; and the maintenance as far as possible of unequal global power relations has been a key concern of the global elite throughout the colonial period. (pp. 83-84)

As Connell (2010) argues, the omnipresent nature of the free market gives the appearance of freedom, but it is the invisible nature of the overarching system that is its danger. Here, Davison and Shire (2015) demonstrate how the invisible nature of neoliberal institutions is part of institutional racism. This racialized language operates to reinforce the notion that "those who are at the top are there because of merit" and that "those who are under-represented lack merit in some way" (p.85). This language of "meritocracy" makes invisible the manner in which

individuals experience success due to other factors including family wealth (p.85). While the free market attempts to be a neutral system based solely on what is popular in the market and the notion that hard work is the sole factor in success, the underlying racist nature of neoliberalism serves to continually reproduce unequal power dynamics.

I include neoliberalism as it is important to recognize that a major aspect of the consumer market is predicated upon selling something; that all that matters is that people buy. However, it is this exact quality as some suggest that is at odds with Islam or religion in general. The image of a market that is not interested in values, but financial gain seems to be counter to religious principles, and so the conversation of Islam, fashion, and consumerism seems to be a case of entangled concepts that do not seem to belong together. More specifically, the implication is that religion is somehow lost or compromised when connected with consumerism and neoliberalism. Yet, as my discussion in the following section illustrates, globalization and the globalizing of neoliberal values has deeply permeated the world of fashion, and its incursions and influence in the realm of Islamic fashion is increasingly apparent.

Islamic Fashion in a Global Context

Issues around consumption, neoliberalism, and fashion, among others, are addressed in the literature on Islamic fashion. Studies have employed interviews with Muslim women, analysis of websites and fashion magazines, from diverse geographical locations. Below I address several pertinent articles about Islamic fashion in order to illustrate how scholars have dealt with these issues in their work.

Political Contexts

My investigation into the areas of fashion and consumption builds on the recent proliferation of research focusing on Muslim women as consumers and Muslim women's fashion. Many of the current studies on Muslim women's fashion and consumerism focus primarily on countries such as Turkey (Timmerman, 2000; Kiliçbay & Binark, 2002; Sandikci & Ger, 2007; Gökariksel & Secor, 2009), the United Kingdom (Dwyer, 2000; Lewis, 2007; Tarlo 2007a, 2007b), and Indonesia (Brenner, 1996; Hassler, 2006; Jones, 2007). Studies have also been conducted in continental Europe (Koskennurmi-Sivonen, Koivula & Maijala, 2004; Christiansen, 2011) and North America (Kopp, 2002; Akou, 2007). More recently, A. Brenda Anderson and F. Volker Greifenhagen (2013) focused on Muslim women's negotiation of dress

and religion in Regina, Saskatchewan (Canada). Banu Gökariksel and Ellen McLarney classify the prevalence of Islamic clothing stores and products as the emerging "Islamic culture industry" in which Muslim women produce and disseminate images, media, and commodities for Muslim women (2010, p. 2). They identify how Muslim women are becoming both producers and consumers.[13] However, they demonstrate that production and consumption in the Islamic culture industry is not solely based on accepting or rejecting either Western or Islamic standards.

Previous studies in the field of Islamic fashion emphasize the role of the political context in which the participants live as a major influence in women's construction of their identities. Ismail (2007), for instance, claims that identity construction is always relevant to the political sphere:

> [P]rojects of the Muslim self, like all such projects, take shape in context and in relation to material conditions, and are, further, enmeshed in power relations. They are never apolitical even when framed or explained in strictly moral or pietistic terms. Thus, projects of Muslim self production should not be seen as divorced from the settings and contexts in which they take place, but as imbricated in and emergent from those settings. (Ismail, 2007, p. 1)

All of these studies situated their research within specific political, socio-cultural, and global contexts, and demonstrate that these contexts influenced the particular consumerist and fashion patterns that emerged.

Many of these studies also took place within two seemingly oppositional but connected social and political settings. These settings included contexts of re-Islamization movements (Ismail, 2007) and also political contexts in which women wearing the headscarf and niqab were attacked, acts that were regarded as responses to the perceived threat symbolized by Islam (Christiansen, 2011; Sandikci & Ger, 2007). These political contexts exist in both countries that are considered Western (located in Europe or North America) and Islamic (with a majority Muslim population). Some of the Western contexts in which these studies were conducted included countries such as Denmark during the headscarf debate (Christiansen, 2011) and in the cosmopolitan context of London (Tarlo, 2007b). In Muslim-majority countries, including Turkey, these studies were contextualized around the headscarf ban (Sandikci & Ger, 2007, p.

[13] While the focus for my dissertation is on how women are taking part in this industry as producers and consumers, and how Muslim women are negotiating their identities, men are also engaging in production of clothing for Muslim women. For example, Emma Tarlo (2010) interviewed Wahid Rahman who created the website HijabShop.com where he sells clothing, hijabs, and accessories for Muslim women.

203), the influence of the 9/11 attacks in the United States (Sandikci & Ger, 2007, p. 203), the shift towards neoliberalism and re-Islamization around the world (Gökariksel & Secor, 2009, p. 8), and in contrast, Turkish secularism (Kiliçbay & Binark, 2002, p. 496). Finally, the popularization of Islam in media and consumption in Turkey (Kiliçbay & Binark, 2002, p. 497), and the emergence of Muslim businesses (Sandikci & Ger, 2010, p. 28) were also explored from the Turkish perspective. In Kuwait, Kelly contextualizes her study by discussing the history of trade and international travel that took place in the country (Kelly, 2010, pp. 216-217). In Yemen, Moors outlines how the increase in the flow of money into the country "stimulated the commodification of consumer goods, such as dress" (Moors, 2007, p. 325). In Indonesia, Hassler demonstrates how the country was "changing cultural norms and Western influences [that] have created a strong demand for Western-style clothing" (Hassler, 2006, p. 150). Most often, these studies took place in countries where Islam was perceived as a threat to the national culture (as is the case in Montreal), or in places where there was an Islamic resurgence or re-Islamization movement, and the two are intrinsically connected. Often, as Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (2007) argues, anti-Islamic sentiment sparks a re-Islamization as evident in the United States during the post-9/11 period.

In their study "New Transnational Geographies of Islamism, Capitalism and Subjectivity," Banu Gökarıksel and Anna J. Secor (2009) write about the re-veiling of Muslim women during what has been identified as the "Islamic resurgence" in Turkey (p. 9). They link this Islamic resurgence with the emergence of Islamic fashion in the country. The rise of these two movements in the country brings up questions of how capitalism, neoliberalism, and Islam operate together without seeming to compromise religious ethics and values or those pertaining to business. Gökarıksel and Secor (2009) focus on how Islamic producers and consumers "are adapting and transforming neoliberal capitalism at the same time as they navigate a complex geopolitical terrain in which Islam—and the iconic Muslim, headscarf-wearing woman—has been cast as a threatening 'Other'" (p. 7). For example, a company they discuss in their article, Tekbir, states that its goal is to encourage more women to dress modestly, and specifically wear the headscarf by making the choice "attractive and fashionable" (p. 15). Here, the authors demonstrate how Islamic companies are using consumerism as a method to change meaning attached to the Islamic headscarf. However, using consumerism as a way to make the headscarf fashionable and acceptable raises questions about why Muslim women decide to wear the

headscarf. Does making the headscarf a consumer product, and a trendy look, mean that the wearer is concerned with "religious, aesthetic or social" ideals (p.15)? The authors focus more on how meanings attached to politics, neoliberalism, and religious are adapted, but not neglected or ignored by either the producers or consumers.

On the other side of the world in Java, Indonesia, Carla Jones (2007) interrogates the connection and negotiation between religion and consumerism. She focuses on how consumers "are framed by and use the authority of consumer choice and religion to produce religious subjectivities that in turn generate their own discourses about agency" (pp. 227-228). The example Jones employs is the style of dress called *busana Muslim,* mentioned previously, which consists of long and loose clothing with sleeves. This style of clothing was not common in Indonesia before the 1980s (p. 212). In her article, Jones critiques the notion that fashion and piety are "mutually exclusive and contradictory analytical categories" (p. 227). Ultimately, she claims that *busana Muslim* has multiple meanings for those who are wearing the clothing and spectators of the style (p. 228). Much like Gökarıksel and Secor (2009), Jones focuses on how the particular style of dress is worn by diverse women with varying perspectives and the meaning-making processes can yield many connotations that must be considered.

Marjorie Kelly's (2010) study, "Clothes, Culture, and Context" focuses on Kuwait. Here, her focus is less on how dress choices are influenced by religious practices than on "economic class, political clout, and cultural sophistication" (p. 235) of her participants. Her research is based on questionnaires completed by female students at the American University of Kuwait, a university with a strict dress code. As well, Kelly also examined "prominent fashion sources" to which women refer to, as well as particular clothing stores in Kuwait. Finally, she focuses on how women are generating their views on fashion, how they are dressing, and in the contexts in which they dress in specific ways (p. 216). Kelly notes that in Kuwait, the population is generally financially well off. There are many choices at the disposal of Kuwaiti consumers, ranging from malls, to the marketplace, to online shopping; they also enjoy the options of choosing between Western and traditional attire (p. 235). Instead of religion serving as a determining factor, Kelly argues that context is what influences dress decisions for Muslim women in Kuwait. These contexts include the geographic location, whether they are in Kuwait or another country, if they are dressing for a specific occasion, as well as who will be in attendance, for example if the event is a women-only or a mixed gathering. Finally, a person's

own ideals factor into their decisions, taking into account their upbringing (p. 235). Furthermore, while there are fashion magazines and other systemic sources that can influence their dress, many Kuwaiti women are more inclined to look to their friends and classmates for fashion influences, as well as what they have access to in local stores (p. 235).

Reina Lewis's study (2005), "Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail," also emphasizes the influence of context. Lewis identifies Southall in West London as a region with a large South Asian population. In that context, women are easily distinguishable as members of different religious communities whether or not they wear the headscarf. Their distinction is more effortlessly understood because the community has knowledge of the differences and details of each style of dress. However, this changes when a woman wearing the headscarf travels outside the region where she becomes understood only as a Muslim (p. 427). Space, then, is a factor influencing how one is perceived and interpellated. Lewis demonstrates how this perspective of people who seem to "pass" for Muslim, due to an Orientalist perspective in which many different cultures and religions from a large, homogenous region are all painted with the same brush, flattens the differences between groups such that Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs are all collapsed into one category. Lewis also ties this perception of Muslim women to the post-7/7 period. This political context spurred "recent attempts by the courts to arbitrate between acceptable and unreasonable forms of veiling [that] play out across the bodies of Muslim women [in] the wider debate about nationality and belonging—often premised on essentialized categories of gender and identity" (p. 438). She concludes that understanding dress choices, particularly that of Muslim women who wear the headscarf, through spatialities serves as manner to analyze the politics of dress in the postcolonial context of British culture (p. 438). This does not only refer to different cultures, but even different neighbourhoods within one city.

In their study of Muslim women in Finland, "United Fashions—Making a Muslim Appearance in Finland," Koskennurmi-Sivonen, Koivula, and Maijala (2004) focus on Muslims living in a non-Muslim majority country. In their interviews with Muslim women from the Middle East, North Africa, Somalia, Finland, as well as teenage girls from Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, all of whom identified as Muslim women, the authors discuss how Muslim women and teenagers in Finland fashioned their identities through dress, and how this construction of dress spoke to how these women understood their own individual identity, as well as their larger

community identity (p. 443-444). Their article moves from how Muslim women look in their clothing and how others see them, to how they "perceive of themselves in their clothes" (p. 445). Some of their participants had converted to Islam, while others are immigrants. One example they give is of a Finnish woman who preferred wearing black clothing before she became a Muslim. However, since being converted, she avoids wearing black clothing due to the stereotype that Muslim women must wear black (p. 448). Many Muslim women also receive clothing from their "home" countries, and also sell these clothes to members of the community in Finland. They combine and unite two fashion systems. Hence, some teenagers in their study represented their Muslim fashion system through certain items, including headscarves as well as long skirts, but included the Western system through their tops as well as their shoes (p. 451). Ultimately, the authors discuss how for many Muslim women the "challenge is to combine [their] internal and external worlds in [their] dress, to find the feeling and look of the self" (p. 456), but for each woman what it means to dress religiously, modestly, as a Muslim, will vary. For example, they state that the Somali teenagers are most interested in fashion, but the way they mix their clothing highlights how they have been able to more easily make choices amid different cultural traditions than the older generation (p. 457). These Muslim women are finding ways to make their clothing reflect their hybrid identities. That being said, their acceptance of their life in Finland is not an outright rejection of their Somali culture. The negotiation of clothing is representative of the negotiation of one's larger identity and understanding of place within a particular culture.

Similarly, Marie Nathalie Leblanc's (2000) study, which involved interviews with three Muslim women in Cote d'Ivoire over different points in time, shows that their expressions of identity through clothing varied; she notes that their "choices cannot be understood outside the frame of the social conditions of identity construction and vice versa" (p. 477). She suggests that factors including age and economic class are influential in their choices (p. 443). Her study, which took place between 1992 and 1995 and again in 1998, found that, due to constructions of femininity that are circulated globally, fashion in Cote d'Ivoire combines "local aesthetics, Muslim cosmology and ideals of Western modernity" (p. 445). Like many of the other studies in other geographic and cultural contexts, Leblanc's work illustrates how Muslim women are often impacted by a variety of cultural influences. Different cultural contexts are characterized by

different values and expectations. These can vary depending on the religious identification of an individual and the context.

In Caroline and Filippo Osella's (2007) article on "Muslim Style in South India," the authors focus on Islam and fashion in the Indian context, another location where Muslims are a minority. Based on two years of fieldwork in Kerala, India, they analyze the differences between Muslim, Hindu and Christian women, and their relationship and negotiation of fashion. The Osellas argue that this is a particularly interesting site for research because not only is there a contrast between Indian and Western attire, but there are also comparisons between Hindi and Muslim dress. However, Kerala also has another element that complicates the issue as well, namely, the presence of "a significant, wealthy, and powerful Christian minority" (p. 235). One point the authors make that is often overlooked in other literature, is that modesty is important to both Muslim and non-Muslim women in south India (p. 234). However, the authors outline the way in which ideals of decency are defined differently by Hindu and Muslim women by how clothing is wrapped. For example, Hindu women understand modesty through the tight wrapping of the sari around the woman's body (p. 236), while for Muslim women, on the other hand, this tightness and binding is not considered modest. Instead, Muslim women will avoid the sari blouse as it reveals a woman's midriff, and will substitute the sari blouse with a full blouse with long sleeves where the body remains concealed (pp. 236-237). They also noticed a difference in how Muslim women engage with fashion in contrast to their Hindu counterparts. Muslims, they observe, enjoy fashion more than Hindus, and this is followed up by the statement that many religious scholars find interest in fashion to be well-within the realm of acceptability (p. 249).

A final example of Islamic fashion around the world comes from Dorothea E. Schulz's (2007) study "Competing Sartorial Assertions of Femininity and Muslim Identity in Mali." This article, much like other research in this field which analyzes the role of Western attire in relation to Middle Eastern or Indian clothing, focuses on Western attire and African clothing. Schulz's analysis centers on how women dress and how they articulate their practices in Mali in order "to explore the competing claims to morality, to proper Muslimhood, and to an authentically African identity that women of various socioeconomic backgrounds and political persuasions articulate" (pp. 255-256). Her participants, she argues, view "the consumption practices of 'Islamist' and 'secularist' women as belonging to two separate, contrasting semantic universes" (p. 256).

However, this viewpoint eliminates the perspectives of Muslim women who are not part of the Islamic revivalist movement, yet identify as practicing Muslims. This portrayal of Muslim women's practices does not make room for diverse practices of Muslim women, and does not incorporate the way Muslim themselves "are more contradictory than they themselves suggest" (p. 256) about their own practices.

Assimilated vs. Traditionalist

Many of these studies center on Muslim women's dress practices as representations of their religious conviction, in conjunction with other issues, rather than as assimilation to an Eastern or Western standard. Özlem Sandikci and Güliz Ger (2010), as well as Emma Tarlo (2007b), focus on the hybridized nature of the consumerist practices of Muslim women. In their respective works, these scholars highlight, through interviews with Muslim women, that dress choices are not simply informed by a dichotomous East vs. West perspective, but also by a variety of aspects, including personal, political, aesthetic, and consumption factors (Sandikci & Ger, 2010, p. 31; Tarlo, 2007b, p. 170). In her analysis of three prominent Muslim women in Britain, Emma Tarlo (2007b) argues "that fashion, religion, and politics are all enmeshed in interesting ways and that memory and biographical experience are equally essential to the analysis of a person's wardrobe" (p. 170). Ultimately, Tarlo demonstrates that dress choices are not simply about either assimilation or resistance, but a variety of aspects that overlap and are part of a person's larger identity, memory and experience.

At the heart of many of these studies is the question of Muslim women's place within complex political, socio-cultural contexts. As many of the studies demonstrate, the simplistic question about Muslim women's dress as either expressive of a form of assimilation or as manifesting adherence to a specific religious or cultural tradition is often a starting point, but rarely, addresses the whole picture. Instead, as these studies outline, specific histories and contextual factors are influential in how dress is perceived and adapted by Muslim women. Furthermore, and most importantly for this study, the fluidity of movement of Muslim women around the world, whether through travel or immigration, along with the influence of increasing globalization, demonstrates that Muslim women are not necessarily exposed to strict and regulated forms of Islamic dress, but rather, engaging with many different influences.

As discussed in the representation section of this dissertation, questions of meaning are accompanied by loaded political and cultural understandings of Muslim women. Whether it is an analysis of how Muslim women are perceived in different spatial locations, or how Muslim women understand their own dress, or what it means to have "pure" intentions when it comes to clothing, these studies demonstrate how inextricable representations of Muslim women have become in discussions around their dress. However, as some of these studies demonstrate, in moving beyond how Muslim women are perceived and instead focusing on how Muslim women perceive themselves, allows for a more complex understanding of how different Muslim women in various contexts self-construct their own identities.

What these studies also reveal is that, as Muslim women engage with different cultural influences, they create their own tactical approaches to dress. Regardless of where they live in the world, even if they are in a Muslim majority country, Muslim women are constantly renegotiating how they identify themselves. Furthermore, not only do different Muslim women within the same geographical context make different decisions about what constitutes appropriate, Islamic dress, but one Muslim woman's conception of Islamic dress may change over the course of her own life, demonstrating that a woman's Islamic identity is constantly in flux and shaped by factors involving their levels of interpretive practice, education, culture and the political landscape in which they are located.

Finally, these studies demonstrate that Muslim women are not solely influenced by religion in their choice of dress, fashion, and consumption. While religion is a factor, how Muslim women employ tactics in their lives illustrates a range of choices that they can and do exercise: style, colours, and designs are some aspects that are often times outside the realm of religious ideals. Since the fashion system, which is more and more influenced by the West, is at times perceived by Muslim women as incongruent with their modesty standards, Muslim women create their own art of the weak in order to make for themselves that which has not been created for them. They are able to consume and enjoy their appearance in ways they deem acceptable, without automatically rejecting their own religious ideals, and taking into account a variety of socio-political factors. They are able to escape such a system without ever leaving it, and by not leaving it, they also re-shape it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outline the theory and the literature that has informed this study. The subversive nature of de Certeau's "tactics" demonstrates how marginalized populations are able to resist oppressive systems while remaining within those systems. This process of "making do" is a creative way that individuals are able to assert themselves; de Certeau defines it is the "art of the weak." "Strategies" and "tactics," then, serve as a useful framework for this study about how Muslim women in Montreal, a minority population which is currently the target of ire in the province, negotiate their engagement with the culture. Much like the cultural contexts explored in the above studies on Islamic fashion, the Montreal context is a prime location for interrogating how Muslim women "make do" when it comes to their choice of clothing. Strategies set up certain kinds of expectations of Muslim women vis-à-vis their dress choices. Due to the complexity of an individual's experience and identity, these studies demonstrate how religion is not the only factor to consider in determining Muslim women's choices, nor, at times, even the most important. However, the Montreal context has yet to be explored in the literature in the field. The following chapter focuses on Montreal, including its political and cultural identity, as well as the consumer environment in the city. This chapter sets up the "strategy" Muslim women are navigating in Montreal.

Chapter 4:
Montreal Scene: Muslim Women and Fashion

"If you've got it, flaunt it"
-common saying

In December of 2015, an Instagram account popped up for Hijarbie.[14] Hijarbie, a name that combines the words Barbie and hijab, is an Instagram account created by Haneefah Adam, a Nigerian Muslim woman (Markovinovic, 2016, para. 4). On the website, Adam dresses Barbie dolls up in fashionable attire that is also appropriate for Muslim women who cover. They all don headscarves with their arms and legs covered. A photograph featured in the Huffington Post article on the topic identifies one of the outfits as "#LBD" which stands for "Long Black Dress," which is a play on the commonly known identifier for the "little black dress," an outfit that is often referred to as a classic. By making it the "long" rather than "little" black dress, Adam is playing on commonly understood fashion terms that reveal a certain value about Western fashion as being sexy with the adage "if you've got it, flaunt it." In fact, this is why Adam created the Hijarbie Instagram page. She saw the Barbie Style Instagram page[15] and stated in an interview "It got me thinking about how I'd actually like to see a doll dressed up like I would have—covered up" (Markovinovic, 2016, para. 6). Adam has her own brand called Hanie Collection (Markovinovic, 2016, para. 7).[16] She stated that her reason for creating the Instagram page was to inspire Muslim girls: "this is about having an alternative and creating an awareness of having toys that adopt your religion and culture and in your own likeness, which at the end of the day, leads to an improvement in self-esteem" (Markovinovic, 2016, para. 10). Adam is choosing a very iconic, and even controversial, doll to adapt: Barbie. Also, she is not the only person, or

[14] The Instagram account for Hijarbie can be found here: https://www.instagram.com/hijarbie/.
[15] The Barbie Style Instagram account can be found here: https://www.instagram.com/barbiestyle/.
[16] The Hanie Collection Instagram account can be found here: https://www.instagram.com/haniecollection/.

company, to attempt to adapt the Barbie doll for non-Western consumers and religions that are not deemed to be Western.

The Barbie doll was invented by Ruth Handler in 1959 (Ducille, 1994, p. 50). Handler was a founder for the company Mattel (Ducille, 1994, p. 50). The first Barbie was named after Handler's daughter and was created in the image of "a sexy German doll and comic strip character named Lilli," who was "all white" (Ducille, 1994, pp. 50-51). However, in 1967, a black doll was created named "Colored Francie" (Ducille, 1994, p. 51). Francie was unsuccessful in the market, which Evelyn Burkhalter, who is identified in the article as the "owner, operator, and curator of the Barbie Hall of Fame in Palo Alto, California," attributes to the particular race relations during this political context (Ducille, 1994, p. 51). The first black doll named "Barbie" was introduced in 1980 (p. 51). However, since then there have been many Barbie dolls with different ethnic and racial identities, part of the "dolls of the world" collection, "most of which look remarkably like the prototypical white Barbie, modified only by a dash of color and a change of costume" (p. 52). Whiteness is the norm against which the other Barbies are compared and in only slightly changing their features, they "become at the hands of contemporary commodity culture: an easy and immensely profitable way off the hook of Eurocentrism that gives us the face of cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference" (Ducille, 1994, p. 52). Even comparing the black Barbie against the white Barbie, Ducilles notes that

Figure 13: Dolls of the World-Moroccan Barbie

> Except for their dye jobs, the dolls are identical: the same body, size shape, and apparel. Or perhaps I should say *nearly* identical because in some instances—with black and Asian dolls in particular—coloring and other subtle changes (stereotypically slanted eyes in the Asian dolls, thicker lips in the black dolls) suggest differently coded facial features. (Ducille, 1994, p. 52, emphasis in original)

Ultimately, this allows for the semblance of multiculturalism and the inclusion of people of colour without the discomfort of having to drift too far from the norm of Western culture and whiteness, "or, in the case of Mattel, without changing the mold" (Ducille, 1994, p. 53). In many

cases in the West, as demonstrated through perhaps one of the most ubiquitous dolls in history, whiteness, blondeness, blue eyes, a thin figure, and large breasts have become a normative standard of beauty. Any deviations from this standard still keep the images as close as possible to that norm. As previously mentioned, in doing so, the Other is made safe in this type of consumption. Different enough to appear as accepting and open to all cultures, while still remaining close enough to the norm to still be considered palatable for consumption. These are values that are not only represented through dolls, but though advertisements and film and television. These cultural values have long been played and re-played in the mass media.

Figure 15: Fulla Doll

Even alternative forms of consumerism still fall prey to a similar pattern. For example, there are two popular Muslim dolls created in the same image of the Barbie doll: Fulla and Razanne. Amina Yaqin (2007) argues in "Islamic Barbie: The Politics of Gender Performativity," that the Razanne doll can be understood as "an attempt to normalize Muslim identity through the lens of fashion" (p. 174). Razanne is meant to embody religious values and Yaqin illustrates this by including information from the company website that Razanne is about more than simply fashion. Yaqin argues that Barbie and Razanne both perform certain gender identities. For example,

Figure 14: Razanne Doll

> Barbie creates the stereotype of a white American blue-eyed blonde-haired beauty that is the object of desire. She has a voluptuous body, her accessories are in tune with modern fashions, and she imbibes a significant proportion of the luxurious comforts on offer in material society. She even has her own bubblebath. Barbie is marked with desire. Razanne on the other hand has been described as possessing a pre-teen body and a sensible modest attitude in contrast to Barbie's frivolity. She too has accessories but they are predetermined by religious conformity or professional obligations. So Praying Razanne has a prayer rug, the schoolgirl has a backpack and books, the teacher,

> a cell phone, laptop, briefcase and sunglasses, and so on. (Yaqin, 2007, pp. 183-184)

The key difference between Razanne and Barbie is in the way in which their sexuality is represented. One example of this difference is how Razanne's sexuality is downplayed as she is wearing a pair of underwear and Barbie's sexuality is heightened by her large breasts (2007, p. 184). Ultimately, the Razanne doll "represent[s] a clearly articulated educational subversion of the norms of American society" (Yaqin, 2007, p. 184), but at the same time Yaqin questions if the Razanne doll is subverting the stereotype of Muslim women or creating a new kind of representation that "universaliz[es]" Muslim female identity (2007, p. 186). Sexuality, as demonstrated through the Barbie and Razanne dolls, are at odds, and sexuality is certainly an issue that came up in my interviews with my participants.

This chapter focuses on the Montreal context in order to show its semblance to de Certeau's notion of "strategy." I interrogate the cultural and political values of Montreal, and also how larger, so-called Western values, operate in the city. I opened this chapter with an analysis of the Barbie and Razanne dolls to highlight one way in which the "strategy" of Montreal culture is constructed and how whiteness, sexuality, and what are commonly identified as Western conceptions of beauty, are part of the strategy. Furthermore, I use the examples of the alternative Barbie dolls, Razanne and Fulla, in order to demonstrate how Islamic values are constructed in order to counter and contrast with Western values that are perceived as incompatible with Islam, for example sexuality, but also how the dolls incorporate aspects of Western culture in order to normalize Islamic beliefs within the Western context. Ultimately, this chapter is about outlining the "strategy" of Montreal in order to understand how Muslim women who took part in this study are navigating and negotiating this strategy.

Sexuality/Sexularism

Sexuality has become a symbol of the difference between Muslims and the West. Even though hypersexuality is part of the stereotype of Muslim women, it is, as mentioned by Said (1994), a dangerous kind of sexuality. Sexuality, in relation to Muslim women, is always represented as a different kind of sexuality than that which is regarded as normative in the West. In the Western context, sexuality often connotes liberty, gender equality, and is connected with secularism. As Joan W. Scott argues,

> The most frequent assumption is that secularism encourages the free expression of sexuality and that it thereby ends the oppression of women because it removes transcendence as the foundation for social norms and treats people as autonomous individuals, agents capable of crafting their own destiny. (2009, p. 1)

She further states that "Religious communities and societies are, from this perspective, relics of another age, and veiled women, their sexuality under wraps, are the sign of backwardness" (2009, p. 1). Scott's work has focused primarily on France, a case study which looks at the issues around hijab bans in the country. There are many overlaps in the discourses around Muslim women in France and the province of Quebec. Many of the same arguments used in Quebec have echoed those articulated in France, and depictions of sexuality as being part of a liberating discourse is part of the argument made against wearing headscarves. While Quebec was never successful in banning the headscarf and face veils, France was able to ban the wearing of headscarves in schools, as well as face veils in public places. Scott's analysis of the role of sexuality in secularism has a direct connection to the way the banning of symbols of religious affiliation was argued for in the province of Quebec. Her coining of the term "sexularism" speaks to the conjoining of secularism and liberated sexuality as the Western normative standards against which all others are judged.

Montreal Political Culture

As mentioned in the introduction, the province of Quebec has a history of "reasonable accommodation" debates that relate to the headscarf. As recently as the summer of 2015, the Quebec Liberal party reignited the reasonable accommodation debate by proposing Bill 62, which would ban the covering of faces by employees of the public sector and individuals receiving government services. As Catherine Solyom of *The Montreal Gazette* wrote, "[e]ven before it was tabled, pundits were calling it 'Charter-Lite' –an ill-conceived and unnecessary attempt to solve the unsolvable and once again put identity issues on the Quebec front page at the expense of a handful of women" (2015, para. 1). This is not the first time the Quebec Liberal party has introduced such a bill. In 2010, they introduced Bill 94, which banned the niqab for those receiving government services (2015, para. 7). However, neither Bill became law. When the Parti Québécois came into power between the Liberal government's terms, they introduced their own bill, the Charter of Quebec Values, now known as Bill 60: A Charter affirming the

values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests. This bill was only the most recent incarnation of this debate and discussion. Again, this Bill too, as mentioned in the introduction, did not pass into law. Many of my interviews were conducted before the Charter was announced and several took place after. Below I discuss this particular political context and how my participants understood and were impacted by these various proposals. The purpose of including the political context of this study, much like other studies I cite in previous chapters, is because Islamic fashion must be understood not in a vacuum devoid of context, but within the political and social contexts of its consumers.

Charter of Quebec Values and Islamophobia

I wrote briefly about the Charter of Quebec Values in the introduction, but it bears expansion in this section as Bill 60 had a profound and direct impact on Muslim women in Quebec, and even specifically the city of Montreal. Immediately following the announcement of the Charter of Quebec Values, Muslim women were met with verbal and physical attacks. The president of the Regroupement des centres de femmes du Quebec, Angela Laroche, noted that since the introduction of the Charter, Muslim women's safety was at risk (CTVNews.ca Staff, 2013, para. 4). The spokesperson for the group, Valerie Letourneau, stated that Muslim women were being treated poorly with "condescending looks, insults, (and) they get spat on the streets" and she continued by saying "It's causing fear. We cannot live with this intolerance" (CTVNews.ca Staff, 2013, para. 5). The announcement of the Charter certainly did not create the intolerance, but it made it acceptable for people to voice their Islamophobia. People were able to hide behind the language of state secularism and gender equality, as those were two of the main ways in which the Charter of Quebec Values was being promoted. The underlying discriminatory nature of the Charter; however, came out in the way Muslim women, and other religious visible minorities, were being treated.

Two Montreal examples of discrimination that were covered in media are Hanady Saad and an unnamed Muslim woman on a city bus. In Saad's case, she was harassed while walking down René-Lévesque Boulevard (CBC News, 2013, para. 1). She stated that a man yelled at her "'Terrorist, go back home, we don't want to see your hijab. You have it take it off'" (CBC News, 2013, para. 2). In the second case which occurred on a bus, a Muslim woman wearing a

hijab was accosted by a male passenger (*The Huffington Post* Canada, 2013, para. 2). The video was taken by another passenger, who remained anonymous, who stated that the attack lasted between five to 10 minutes (para. 3). The man began the argument when the Muslim woman entered the bus. He told her "to remove her headscarf or return to her country" (para. 4). The Muslim woman responded by calling the passenger "a coward" (para. 5). During the discussion, the male passenger cited Pauline Marois, who was the Premier of Quebec during the Charter of Quebec Values debate, and at one point told the Muslim passenger "This is our home! With Marois, we're going to take off your hat" (para. 6).

In both cases, the Muslim women who were attacked were told to leave and go back to their own country. The sense that Muslim women do not belong to the nation by individuals who identify as Quebecois is reinforced here as Muslim women, regardless of where they are born, are identified as foreigners. In the second case, the man on the bus assumed a symbolic ownership of the land by stating that "This is our home!" Muslim women, in this rendition of Quebec culture, do not belong and are encroaching on a culture in which they do not belong. Of course, there was no mention of the reality that Quebec is indigenous land!

There is also a reference to violence, both attributed to the Muslim women as well as the threat of violence made against them to conform. In the first case, the Muslim woman is being identified as the terrorist; she is the embodiment of violence. It is the Muslim woman who is being forced to wear the burden of terrorism. In the second case, the Muslim woman is told by the passenger that "we're going to take off your hat," suggesting that they will take it off by force if necessary. In this sentence, the man also uses the "we" to symbolize the overall general Quebec culture that is going to take off her headscarf. The violence of the statement is implicit, but is suggested by saying that if the Muslim woman does not make the correct choice, Quebec citizens will collectively, and through government action, remove her headscarf by force if necessary.

Both of these cases illustrate how the simple announcement of the Charter of Quebec Values significantly impacted on the lived experiences of many Muslim women in Quebec. Muslim women were regarded as contrary to Quebec's cultural values and its identity as a secular state. During the turmoil of the Charter of Quebec Values, citizens who defined Quebec's culture as one devoid of Muslims found a seemingly sanctioned way to voice those opinions.

Quebec Life Pre-Charter

This project began before the Charter of Quebec Values was introduced and before it became a contentious issue dominating the media from its announcement until the provincial election that was held in April 2014. Even so, the Charter of Quebec Values was not the inspiration for this project, since many of my interviews were conducted the summer preceding the Charter's announcement, and at that time many Muslim women I interviewed were dealing with other, often related, issues in relation to their Islamic identities.

Many of the women I interviewed noted that the Muslim community in Montreal is large and incredibly diverse. As Rabia stated, "*Moi je dirais à Montréal, on est, je dis qu'il y a une très grande diversité culturelle au niveau de la religion musulman parce qu'il y a des musulmans chinois, des arabes, il y a des noirs, il y a des tout en fait, c'est très beau à voir.*"[17] However, it is not only the sheer number of Muslims living in Montreal, but also the experience that these Muslim women have with non-Muslims in the city. Sorouja mentioned that her experience in Montreal has been different from her experience in Toronto.

> *Montreal's been good, Montreal's been good. I think there's a huge population of Middle Eastern people in the city, so I think people are used to it, they're comfortable. So far I haven't had, any really difficult experiences so far, people have been very, very nice. They've been very, very nice they've been very, very warm and, I mean they're accepting and I don't know, they're nice about it as opposed to, I mean Toronto is a whole different…*

There were other participants who noted that their experiences in Montreal differed from their experiences in other cities in Canada and around the world. Marie discussed the political context in France, including the law to ban face coverings in public that had recently been passed. She stated that the law in France was frustrating.

> *Frustrated. When I think about the situation in France: frustrated. I can't understand why they make a law like that. I don't understand why it's allowed to have magazines with naked women on the street like at kids' level, but a woman who chooses to cover up gets a fine or gets arrested, I just don't understand. I don't understand why it bothers them so much. Sometimes I really feel because I'm, I follow the news in France quite a lot and I'm so, al-humdullilah I don't live in France, and I would never want to live in France. It's terrible and I hope that it's not going to be like that*

[17] Translation: I would say in Montreal, we are, I mean that there is a large cultural diversity in the Muslim religion because there are Chinese, Arabs, there are Blacks, and there are all kinds, in fact, it's very beautiful to see.

> *here. I'm really glad that we live now in a society where we can choose who we are and what beliefs we have.*

However, even with this kind of open environment in Montreal, many women discussed difficulties they have experienced. Sima mentioned that she felt Montreal society to be quite open-minded and she had not really had any problems, but that

> *des fois j'ai remarqué avoir des petits regards, comme, sont méchants. Mais des mondes, je les ignore parce que, comme toujours, sont ignorants puis ils sont pas capables d'accepter le fait qu'il y a des personnes différentes, tu comprends. Comme, justement on dit que c'est vraiment une minorité, puis c'est ça là*.[18]

Zineb stated that after she started wearing a headscarf, people started staring at her : "*La première chose dans toutes les façons que j'ai remarquées c'est que je suis devenue un peu une star. On me regarde un peu souvent qu'avant, surtout l'été quand je sors du métro.*"[19] Many of my participants wore the headscarf; as a result, they became visible minorities and their feelings of being Othered were heightened, even in Montreal, a city they all saw as being open and accepting. Despite the fact that there is a large Muslim population in Montreal and a large degree of overall diversity beyond the Muslim community, Muslim women recognized that wearing the headscarf caused them to be visibly different from the rest of the normative culture.

The participants illustrated the tension that exists between the seeming openness and diversity of Montreal culture and feelings of Othering and exclusion, which became even more apparent when these participants spoke about jobs. Zineb recounted a story about a job interview during which she was asked about her headscarf: "*J'avais passé une entrevue puis on m'a dit, est-ce que tu vas travailler avec ton voile? C'est pas une décoration en fait. C'est ça que j'avais envie de répondre au monsieur, mais bon, fait que, je dis pas que c'est discriminatoire*."[20] What is most interesting about this response is that she hesitated to state that the interviewer's action was discriminatory. The discriminatory nature of the comment was seemingly less overt and possibly masked by the seeming acceptance of diversity in Montreal. It is important to again

[18] Translation: sometimes I've noticed receiving little looks that are mean. But these people, I ignore them because, like always, they're ignorant and they are not able of accepting the fact that there are people who are different, you understand. Like, rightly it is said that it is really a minority, then there's it.
[19] Translation: The first thing in all the ways that I noticed is that I became a bit of a star. People watch me a little bit more often than before, especially in the summer when I exit the metro.
[20] Translation: I had an interview and I was told, are you going to work with your veil? It's not a decoration, in fact. That's what I wanted to respond to the man, but anyway, I'm not saying it is discriminatory.

note that the participant was asked about her religious headscarf during a job interview before the Charter of Quebec Values was announced. Imane also felt this frustration in her job search stating:

> *parce qu'on juge, surtout maintenant là, on juge pas sur les aptitudes d'une personne, on juge sur leurs apparence. Alors que moi, si on mettait une fille pas voilée et moi, qui est voilée, on a les même capacités et les mêmes aptitudes, les mêmes, les mêmes talents si on veut, ils vont prendre elle parce qu'elle n'est pas voilée. Mais pourquoi, lorsque je suis autant meilleure qu'elle, sinon plus peut-être, mais moi je pense qu'on devrait plus juger sur les capacités des gens, leurs études, leurs talents, plutôt que la façon d'habiller et leur apparence*.[21]

This participant demonstrates that the concern was based on dressing visibly as a Muslim. There is a feeling based on experience that their aptitudes and abilities are judged differently than for a woman who is not wearing the headscarf. The injustice felt by this participant who sees her hard work and potential contribution to the workforce perceived as less valuable than her non-visibly Muslim counterparts, is palpable.

Finally, these experiences in Montreal during pre-Charter days reveal a common thread: being a Muslim in a country where Muslims are a minority is difficult. There is a constant reminder that Muslims are not truly members of society, despite the diversity and openness of Montreal culture and sheer number of Muslim women around, and there is a sense that Muslims are Othered during their daily activities. Their practices are regarded as being outside of the norm. As Reem, who is from Saudi Arabia and in Montreal for further education, stated, being a Muslim in Saudi Arabia is easy:

> *It's so easy. Everything around you reminds you that you are a Muslim, even before ten days of Hajj, you know, we want to fast, right, but you don't remember because you are here and no one cares about that. But when you are there you hear your grandmother, okay tomorrow you come here to eat with me, so that's will help you stay on track. And also I don't know, it's hard here at the beginning because you have to fight yourself. There it's easier and you have to listen to in media or when you go out, you listen about Islam, hadith, you listen a lot, but here, no. You*

[21] Translation: because we judge; especially now, we don't judge, on the abilities of a person, we judge on their appearance. While I, if we put a girl not veiled and me, who is veiled, we have the same capacity and the same abilities, the same, the same talent if you will, they will take her because she's not veiled. But why, when I'm much better than her, if not more perhaps, but I think we should judge more on people's abilities, their education, their talent, rather than the way people dress and their appearance.

> *have to search about these kinds of things. It's hard at the beginning you have to fight yourself, and when I came here I know who I will give myself like out of ten a good Muslim. When I came here I know where I am.*

In a Muslim-majority country, Islamic needs are catered to, making it easier to practice the faith than in a country where those needs are not considered. There are reminders for citizens that they are Muslim, whereas in Montreal, individuals need to search for their religion and are constantly challenged to remain Muslim and continue practicing Islam, even while experiencing the Othering that Muslims, and especially Muslim women, face. Even prior to the public furor about the Charter of Quebec Values, Muslim women had to navigate many issues in Montreal society. As many of my participants covered their hair, they had to negotiate their identity and everyday practices. These negotiations, related to how people reacted to their visible Muslimness, ranged from the more benign experiences of dealing with stares on the street to the threat of survival by an inability to find work. Ultimately, as a "strategy," Montreal culture is not created for many of Muslim women's specific needs.

Quebec Life Post-Charter of Quebec Values

When the Charter of Quebec Values was introduced in the fall of 2013, there was a more direct shift in how the Muslim women in my study were treated. While the discrimination they had encountered before the Charter was introduced was implicit and less overt, following the announcement of the Charter, the participants I spoke with felt that the discrimination they encountered had become much more overt. One comment that I received in several interviews was that there was a shift where it suddenly became appropriate or permissible to be openly critical of Muslim women. As Yousra stated,

> *je pense que ça leur donnait le droit de sortir le racisme ouvertement et on a dit, okay, ceux qui ne sont pas d'accord avec les arabes ou ceux qui sont pas d'accord avec les femmes voilées, vous avez le droit maintenant de dire ce que vous pensez. Je trouvais que ça n'allait pas avec les lois du Canada qui disaient qui provenait la liberté, les droits d'expressions, le droit de la religion, tout ça, ça vient contredire et maintenant il y a plus. Bon, moi, personnellement, j'étais chanceuse j'ai rien vécu de négatif, mais j'ai entendu parler qu'y a des sœurs* [en islam] *qui se sont faite arracher leur voile, qui se sont* [fait] *critiquer ou* [fait] *crier dessus en public depuis cette fameuse Charte. Avant les gens ils nous regardent pas, ou s'ils nous regardent c'est*

> *respectueusement, ils ne disent pas commentaires maintenant c'était, c'est comme ça l'a augmenté, ça a alimenter quelque chose qui était peut-être présente, en cachette, mais, qui a donné la loi, qu'on peut le sortir publiquement.*[22]

This participant discussed how the Charter of Quebec Values gave people the right to be openly racist. Public expression of Islamophobia became state-sanctioned and approved. Even more so, this type of racist behaviour was encouraged, in a way, as the threat to secularism, gender equality, and Quebec culture was perceived as so superior and threatened that such racism was a service necessary to protect it.

One way that Muslim women described this period was that it was like they were put under a microscope. As Amal stated, "*C'est comme si cette Charte, ou cette discussion sur la Charte, a permis aux gens de te mettre sous le microscope qui tu es, d'où viens-tu, pourquoi tu mets le voile, genre, c'est comme une atteinte à ma liberté, par exemple*."[23] These women were extremely aware of the fact that there was an expectation from perhaps not the entire population, but at least from those who agreed with the Charter, as to whether they should be allowed to wear the headscarf. There was a sudden demand that Muslim women explain themselves and that, because of the Charter, people finally had the right to tell these women exactly what they thought of them. This was the power of the Charter, that it activated citizens to protect their culture.

It was not only the way they were treated that was frustrating for Muslim women, but also the wording of the Bill, which suggested that Muslim women needed saving, as one of the reasons underpinning the Charter was that it was to enforce gender equality. In other words, that Muslim women do not enjoy gender equality. Such a statement reinforces the stereotype that Muslim women require saving from the West. As Yousra commented about the Charter, "*Ça*

[22] Translation: I think it gave them the right to be openly racist and we said, okay, those who are not okay with Arabs or not in agreement with veiled women, you now have the right to say what you think. I found that it didn't go with Canadian laws that give the right to freedom, right of expression, the right to religion, all that, it contradicts and now there is more. Well, me, personally, I was lucky I didn't experience anything negative, but I heard talk that there are sisters [in Islam] who had their veils ripped, who were criticized or yelled at in public since this famous Charter. Before people would not look at us, also they would look at us with respect, they didn't say comments now it's, it's as if it increased, it fed something that was maybe present, but hidden, but, which gave them the right, that they can bring it out in public.

[23] Translation: It's as if this Charter, or the discussion of the Charter, has allowed people to put you under the microscope who you are, where you're from, why you put on the veil, like, it's like an attack on my freedom, for example.

nous infantilise, moi, je trouve ça insultant."[24] Amal raised the issue of how the Charter would impact on Muslim women's employment, isolating them even more from mainstream society:

> *Moi, ce qui est dommage, par exemple, c'est que, ils disent que c'est pour la liberté des femmes et pour l'égalité des droits entre les hommes et les femmes. Et je pense que c'est contrairement, c'est contradictoire. C'est pas ça, c'est vraiment une loi qui va, qui va rendre encore la femme plus vulnérable. Parce qu'elle va pas pouvoir travailler, et parce qu'elle se sent déjà marginalisée et on va la mettre au lieu qu'elle sort et qu'elle s'active et qu'elle s'intègre dans la société on va l'isoler, elle va rester chez elle.*[25]

Ultimately, the message of the Charter was perfectly encapsulated in Khaoula's statement. Even as a Muslim Quebecker, she felt like she was being told she did not belong in Quebec:

> *I'm very hurt because, obviously, I'm a Quebecker and I'm not accepted here anymore, because I chose to put. For them it's not, me it has a lot of value, for them, it's just a headscarf, a scarf, so what scarf, you know. That you usually, people put in the neck, well, I chose to put it on my head, what does it do to you, you know. Why is it, does it offend you, I'm just expressing myself in a way to, and I'm not touching your values, I'm not forcing it to you, I'm just a normal citizen that chose to wear what I'm wearing, you know.*

Khaoula's statement speaks to the way Muslim women living in Montreal have complex identities. As many of them identify as Quebecois, the Charter of Quebec Values demarcated a line of who should be considered a *real* Quebecois and who is not. For many Muslim women, simply being a Muslim woman is not at odds with identifying as a Quebec citizen. By seemingly making these Muslim women choose one identity, Muslim women are forced to decide what their identities mean to them and how their positionalities can co-exist without compromise.

Besides the issue of identity, the Charter also supported the idea in the public consciousness that Muslim women, along with Sikh men and Jewish men, do not belong and are, in a way, illegal. This newly reinforced sentiment generated an atmosphere of racism and hatred that was felt by the Muslim women in this study, and it was not the first time that something like

[24] Translation: It infantilizes, me, I find that insulting.
[25] Translation: Me, what is unfortunate, for example, is that they say it's for women's freedom and for gender equality. And I think that it's contrary, it's contradictory. It's not, it's really a law that will, it will make women more vulnerable. Because they will not be able to work, and because they already feel marginalized and we're going to put them, instead of leaving and being active and that they'll integrate into the society, we're going to isolate them, they'll stay home.

this had been proposed and discussed in Quebec's political sphere. Their illegality gave *true* citizens the right to treat Muslim women how they wanted.

Since many of my interviews took place before the Charter of Quebec Values was announced and some took place following, the difference in the political context was reflected in our conversations. Though it took place over a decade ago, the subject of 9/11 and its lasting impact on Muslim communities also came up in the interviews. For many people who are unfamiliar with the Quebec political environment, the Charter may have seemed like the first occurrence of these types of debates, specifically in regards to the headscarf, but larger debates about reasonable accommodation have been taking place for years. However, as many Muslim women discussed in their interviews, even prior to the Charter of Quebec Values, Muslim women were still being Othered or were still being identified as not belonging in Montreal. While I do believe that the introduction of the Charter of Quebec Values during the process of my research certainly gave my project a renewed significance, it was hardly the only political issue relevant to this study.

I did observe, however, that political issues were more front and center in the minds of Muslim women in the interviews following the announcement of the Charter of Quebec Values. While political issues were relevant and discussed in the interviews before the Charter, they did not occupy as much space in our discussions as they did following the announcement of the Charter. The interviews post-Charter illustrated how immediate and threatening the recent announcement of the Charter impacted Muslim women. Furthermore, in the pre-Charter interviews, the discussions around discrimination were at times abstract, at times hypothetical, but could also be very real. While in the post-Charter announcement interviews, the discrimination and concern was tangible. The Charter stood out as a concrete barrier engraved into the experience of Muslim women in Montreal.

As is evident from the responses of my participants, many Muslim women were incredibly aware of the political context in which they were living, the precariousness of their situation, and the violence they could encounter on a daily basis. Not only that, they understood that the way the government was portraying them had a large influence on the way people viewed them and how they were treated during these tumultuous times. The Charter reinforced a representation of Muslim women as Othered, oppressed, and in need of saving. Examined in this context, it is

apparent how the political arena influences other cultural activities such as those regarding interpretations and performances of dressing and fashion.

Montreal's Fashion Culture

While Montreal has made great strides to become a fashion capital, it has yet to reach the same status as other cities including Paris or Tokyo, which are known as "global fashion centers" (Sark & Bélanger-Michaud, 2015, p. 398). One major question in regards to this dissertation is what does it mean to shop in Montreal? What is available and is there a general style in the city? Given the diversity of choices, different cultural influences and interests, not to mention the availability of online shopping, deciding on a unified identity that marks Montreal's fashion style is difficult to pin down. Norma Rantisi (2011) recognizes this in her article "The Prospects and Perils of Creating a Viable Fashion Identity" when she comments that "The key challenge is in identifying the attributes that can nurture a symbiotic relation, and in channeling government support towards the development of a distinct yet *viable* fashion identity" (pp. 260-261, emphasis in original). One manner in defining a fashion identity is not necessarily through a particular type of style as "fashion, by definition, defies one 'look,' one could argue that the identity of a fashion center is constituted not by a particular national style or regional costume but by the localized capabilities that produce new styles or redefine old ones" (Rantisi, 2011, p. 261). Rantisi argues that such "localized capabilities" include different key aspects of the industry ranging from the design of fashion, to the marketing of these designs, (their production and distribution), as well as "the interaction and coordination between industry actors" (p. 261).

One such intermediary Rantisi identifies is the Montreal Fashion Week. She argues that the Montreal Fashion Week operates as a way for different actors involved with the fashion industry to get together since there are many meetings and events. This is where designers engage with buyers as well as marketers (p. 263). However, the Montreal Fashion Week, came to an end in 2013 after a 25 year run (The Canadian Press, 2013, para. 5; Friede, 2013, para. 1). One of the reasons for the cancellation was that funding from the government had been cut down by a half to $125, 000 by the 2012 September event and then completely eliminated (Friede, 2013, para. 18). However, the inclusion of a Montreal fashion week demonstrates a move on the part of the city towards becoming a fashion center.

Katrina Sark and Sara Danièle Bélanger-Michaud (2015) analyze the part museums play in bringing fashion events and happenings to the cultural institutions, as well as "tying fashion to its cultural institutions" (pp. 398-399). Their article focuses on the integration of fashion in three Montreal museums including: Musée McCord, Musée du Costume et du Textile du Québec, and the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal. They argue that "the three museums ground the locational history of fashion in Montreal, while simultaneously facilitating dialogues and networks with international fashion icons and systems" (p. 413). They contend that what they refer to as "Montreal Chic," is a combination of a mixture of local and global fashion systems, as well as an identity that builds on local history, as well as international influences (p. 412). The Montreal fashion identity, or Montreal chic, then, is a dialogue between international and local fashion systems.

These authors emphasize the networks that are created within Montreal's cultural institutions to produce fashion that is reflective of the city's identity. It is important to note that the networks that are created through these intermediaries rely on certain connections and visibility, which is not always possible for less prominent or more marginalized groups. Despite the way in which these intermediaries try to incorporate different international designers, there are still groups who will not attain any kind of visibility.

Figure 16: Saint Catherine Street, Montreal, Quebec

Taking this into account, what is featured at Fashion Week and in the various museums in the city of Montreal, and what is available and accessible to the general public, are two very different entities. While there are certainly specialty boutiques and more independent stores, there are also commercial centers where there is large amount of consumer traffic and many popular chain stores. One such location is Saint Catherine street in the downtown center of Montreal. On a tourism website for Montreal, www.tourisme-montreal.org, Saint Catherine street is described as

> Montréal's main commercial artery. The part of the street starting at Saint-Laurent Boulevard, going west, is home to the city's largest stores, such as the Bay, Simons, Birks and Ogilvy, as well as to an array of shops and several shopping centres, including Les Cours Mont-Royal, Place Montréal Trust, Eaton Centre, Complexe Les Ailes and Promenades Cathédrale. (n.d., para. 1)

This area is also a place where many of my participants discussed shopping. It is an easily accessible location for shopping; the length of Saint Catherine street is punctuated by several metro stations, as well as stores that appeal to younger as well as ageing consumers offering a variety of choices of style from cheaper to the more expensive options. The street also allows for friends to enjoy the day together as there are restaurants and coffee shops located throughout.

While it may seem as though Saint Catherine street is devoid of a unifying identity, the unifying appeal of the street is how much it draws people. The mass appeal; however, falls into familiar patterns of relying on whiteness as an exnominated background. Whiteness, here, is seen as the default. As the default, it operates to affirm whiteness as the norm. Furthermore, the way many of the models featured on the advertisements peppering the street are dressed in ways that do not conform with the guidelines that many of my participants abide by. Models in the advertisements are meant to demonstrate how the clothing is meant to be worn at its best.

A prominent example of Saint Catherine street advertisement is in the advertisement for La Senza lingerie in Figure 16. This particular image has been conspicuously displayed since, if not before, 2010 when I first moved to the city. It is impossible to miss it while walking down the street. The image consists of a woman with her back turned to her audience; she is not wearing a top and is only wearing a pair of underwear and high heels. While such an image is in no way representative of *how* individuals dress in Montreal, it is an indication of the manner in

which advertisements in the city's most renowned shopping area promote and model clothing. There is a distinct emphasis on female beauty as relayed through sexuality.

While there is no unified identity in terms of a fashion identity in Montreal, I would argue that the networks Rantisi cites, as well as Saint Catherine street in Montreal, demonstrate that accessibility and connections are important when it comes to fashion consumption in Montreal. Being a prominent member of the fashion community still requires visibility in the community, and that is not always available to all. Furthermore, the stores on Saint Catherine street are major commercial chains, and their placement on the main commercial location in Montreal contributes to their establishment as icons of fashion.

Conclusion

To discuss how Muslim women are making choices in Montreal it is first important to understand the landscape in which they are making their decisions. While there are a variety of options in Montreal, there are still consumer centers that attract the most people and are the most accessible to the public. Although they appeal to a large general public, they still maintain certain beauty standards that are at odds with how many Muslim women understand their dress guidelines. While these clothing stores are not making an explicit attempt to exclude Muslim women from their consumer base, their designs are simply not conducive to the needs of many Muslim women.

The exclusion of Muslim women from consideration in the consumer sphere is also echoed and reinforced by how Muslim women are being excluded from the cultural and political spheres as well. Through the many bills and governmental actions that attempt to restrict and redefine Muslim women in the Quebec landscape, it would seem as though Muslim women's attempts at integration and interaction in Montreal culture are limited and made difficult. These are the strategies that influence Muslim women's involvement in Montreal. To return to de Certeau, Muslim women who call Montreal their home are put in the position of trying to "escape it without leaving it." This means that Muslim women need to figure out how to navigate and exist in a culture that is clearly finding ways to ignore them at best, and at worst, demonize and erase them. Muslim women are still finding ways to be fashionable even with a plethora of options that are created without them in mind. How Muslim women navigate this

strategy speaks to how Muslim women use their power to carve out a place for themselves in Montreal.

Chapter 5:
Agency in Consumption: Using and Sharing the Tricks of the Trade

"Make it work!"
-Tim Gunn, Fashion Consultant, Project Runway

Make It Work!

On the reality television show *Project Runway*, a group of designers are given a limited amount of time and resources to design an outfit on a specific theme. The consultant on the series, Tim Gunn, became famous for the three words he would say to the designers to encourage them in the process of their design and construction: "Make it work." These words were relevant, because the designers had to make do with what was available, and if they did not have enough fabric or if they made a mistake, they would just have to "make it work." As a Muslim woman shopping in a market that does not explicitly cater to my modesty guidelines, I have to remind myself to "make it work" every time I go shopping. Shopping can be a frustrating, exhausting experience, and it requires patience and an eye to "hijabify"[26] – a term I use to describe an end product that can be created which would satisfy criteria of modesty (covering up areas of the body). It is rare that a Muslim woman will find an item at a store that she can wear as is, without having to adjust it in some way. One particular example of this occurred when I was in high school. I was trying to find a long skirt that was not tight and did not have a slit. To me, a skirt signified femininity, fanciness, and something appropriate for a special occasion. I looked everywhere for a long, wide skirt without a slit in it. The search, seemingly endless, culminated in the discovery of a long, pink skirt without a slit at Smart Set. It had a few large flowers on it, but they were not in a matronly, old-lady style, a major concern of mine at that age. The skirt was stylish, youthful, and not dowdy. It was far too long for my short legs, so I had to

[26] While I have refused to use the word "hijab" to refer to the headscarf, here, as will become evident throughout his chapter, the use of the term "hijabfiy" references clothing that covers.

roll it up. However, it worked out fine and I liked the skirt…for a little while, of course. Later, I saw an older classmate at school wearing the exact same skirt and I told her I had bought the same one. She told me that she hated that she couldn't find any skirts without slits in them. I remember being in shock that a non-Muslim woman had the same concern! However, it was not often that I would find an item that only needed a simple adjustment like being rolled up. That was the easiest adjustment I have ever made. Normally, the process of finding clothes and making them appropriate is much more involved, but like many other Muslim women, I have also become more skilled at the process since high school.

This chapter focuses on how Muslim women create and employ their "tactics," to "make it work," so as to enable them to find clothes in the Montreal market. This is where my research engages Muslim women in Montreal and how they define their own practices and behaviours, as well as interests in fashion. The active approach Muslim women make in the Montreal market reflects how they escape an oppressive culture without leaving it, which also shows, as de Certeau suggests, the uniqueness of the tactics. My aim in this chapter is to interrogate the intersections of modernity, religion, gender, Islamic identity, transnationalism, neoliberalism, and capitalism. These issues are prominent and demonstrate the complexity of the concept of Islamic fashion (Gökariksel & Secor, 2009, pp. 7-8). I explore these issues in relation to the consumption styles that are specific to my participants, Muslim women living in Montreal, who are also engaged with the city's fashion scene.

Muslim Women and Consumption

Much like the concepts of fashion and Islam, the concepts of consumerism and Islam are also seemingly oppositional. Looking back at the stereotypes associated with Muslims, the concept of consumption seems disconnected from the image of a 'backwards people' living in the desert. Theorists who have focused on Islam and the consumer market have tended to concentrate on the emergence of new types of consumption and marketing styles that resist Western systems (Kiliçbay & Binark, 2002; Lewis, 2007), as well as on how patterns of consumption and marketing are influenced by local and global dynamics (Sandikci & Ger, 2007, p. 190, 2001; pp. 149-150). Many of these studies focus on fashion and its decentralization. Emma Tarlo (2007b) argues that many studies on fashion have looked at how individuals who are not part of the corporate fashion world "create new looks and ensembles from the visual and

material resources available, thereby participating in the formation of new 'subcultural' and 'street' styles, which may or may not become mainstream" (p. 144). Interestingly, she suggests that this same subcultural perspective has not been attributed to women who dress religiously. Those who dress religiously are not considered to form a new, fashionable subculture, but are perceived as dressing in an "old-fashioned" (p. 144) manner. However, Tarlo takes issue with this assumption and argues that it is "being challenged on a daily basis by the proliferation of religiously oriented fashions in the streets of most major cosmopolitan cities in the West" (p. 144). Tarlo's work illustrates the complexities of the issues concerning Muslim women and dress by moving the discussion away from dress either as an expression of assimilation to the West or, that of resistance and conformity to an Islamic system. In fact, dress practices include a whole host of issues that complement and sometimes even contradict each other. Muslim women encode and decode meanings and form identity constructions that are reflective of their daily negotiations; so how Muslim women use tactics, the kinds of tactics they develop, and how they develop them are issues that I address in the final section of this chapter.

Much of the challenge for Muslim women who want to dress modestly and fashionably is finding clothing that works within their guidelines in mainstream stores (Sandikci & Ger, 2001, p. 148). As Sandikci and Ger stated in reference to tesettür, which they describe as "dress that complies with Islam" (p. 148), Muslim women must "pursue their identity projects and perform their potentialities by both submitting to restrictions and exercising their free will" (2010, p. 31). Many Muslim women are searching for clothes that fit modesty guidelines by not showing the shape of the body, but that are "stylish and modern. What they aspire to have is a look that is aesthetically pleasing and refined yet does not draw carnal attention" (Sandicki & Ger, 2001, p. 148). These styles can be difficult to find, especially in a Western market that emphasizes body types and enhancing one's figure. How Muslim women reappropriate clothing to deal with these limitations demonstrates a tactical approach to being Muslim in the West.

Sartorial Biographies

In approaching the way that Muslim women practice consumption in Montreal, I employed Emma Tarlo's framework of "sartorial biographies". This framework focuses on the choices that Muslim women make, why they make their choices, and what their choices mean to them. While Tarlo's framework also focuses on how Muslim women's clothes are read by

members of the dominant society, e.g. wearing "Western" clothing as being read as a sign of their assimilation, she underscores the importance of meaning-making from the consumers' perspective. Tarlo's framework then resonates with de Certeau's notion of "tactics," in that it focuses on how Muslim women navigate the dominant consumer strategy. It also connects to the "third way" of consumption as outlined by du Gay et al., in that it looks at the uses, adaptations, alterations, and the meaning consumers make with and of their products.

Tarlo's approach in "sartorial biographies," is to analyze how her participants' experiences and interests come together through their discussions of dress. As she puts it:

> What is interesting about their sartorial inventiveness is that it is born not out of an overriding preoccupation with fashion as such, nor out of a desire to promote particular cultural, religious or political views, but rather out of biographical experiences in which religion, politics, fashion, memory, environmental concerns, aesthetic preoccupations, and a sense of global awareness are all enmeshed. (2007b, pp. 144-145)

In her study, Tarlo focuses on three women who live active and public lives in London, United Kingdom. She details how these three women do not live stereotypical Muslim lives, but rather, that they have "lives characterized by high levels of transcultural interaction, whether through travel and histories of migration or through their participation in the multicultural environment of contemporary London" (p. 145). By using this framework in the Montreal context, I am able to understand the ways in which the clothing Muslim women wear in Montreal tell a story about their lives, histories, activities, and values. Further, the sartorial biographical approach allows me to do so without constraining and containing their choices within a binary as either for or against certain cultural or religious values in favour of others. As Tarlo writes, this framework

> enables a shift away from the stereotypes of conventional oppositions (religion vs. fashion, traditional vs. modern, ethnic vs. Western, Islam vs. West) towards a focus on the complexity and transformative potential of personal experience in the creative and symbiotic relationship between people and their clothes. (p. 145)

Using this approach allows me to avoid the pitfalls that often come into discussions of Muslim women as either oppressed or liberated by and through the West.

In her book *Visibly Muslim*, Emma Tarlo (2010) expands on her analysis of Muslim women and fashion in London. She discusses the difficulties of finding clothes in the London market that are conducive to the religious guidelines that Muslim women follow. She argues

that while the market in London has a booming Islamic fashion scene, it does not always satisfy the styles of individual Muslim women, and that these women are "combining both the local and the trans-national in particular ways" (p. 189). Tarlo also points out that even the emerging market of Islamic fashion "does not exclude the mainstream fashions of the British high street but incorporates and re-works them. Young visibly Muslim girls know where and how to seek out garments which can be made compatible with Islamic constraints" (pp. 189-190). Tarlo points out how Muslim women have developed a specific knowledge base of where to find clothes that can meet their needs or clothing that can be easily altered to fit with their requirements. However, simply knowing what to do and where to look does not mean that finding clothing is still not a challenge:

> They know which boutiques stock a good range of long-sleeved polo neck tops suitable for wearing under sleeveless dresses; which seasonal collections contain clothes good for layering and most in tune with Muslim tastes; which shops offer an interesting range of 'hijabable' scarves, headbands and shawls; and which 'ethnic markets' offer the latest and best-priced range of imported cloth, clothing, jewellery and accessories that might be incorporated into new Islamically aware outfits. (p. 190)

She further details how the activity of shopping for the Muslim women in London is a combination of knowing the available merchandise, knowing the different outlets from where to buy this merchandise, as well as an ability and creative eye that allows for inventive tactics to make the clothing work. This description of the process of shopping, and the research that goes into the activity, suggests that shopping is an active process in which Muslim women are observing, collecting information, and analyzing how it can be used in their own wardrobe and within their guidelines.

Tarlo also describes attending an exhibition in London called "The Art of Integration," by Peter Saunders and the styles worn by the women who attended. She notes that women were wearing trendy clothing complete with "strappy dresses" that were worn with "long-sleeved blouses and trousers and teamed with chiffon or silk hijabs." The hijabs were adorned with "sparkling broaches and worn with well-chosen earrings and elegant shoes" (p. 71). Tarlo's description of the clothing illustrates the combination of stylish, and perhaps risqué items, like "strappy dresses" matched and made modest with long-sleeved tops and pants. Her discussion of the sartorial biographies and tactics expands on these choices and shows how they work in the

lives of different Muslim women she interviewed. This framework is useful to apply to the Montreal context in order to discuss what is similar in both cases, and yet, what is specific to the Montreal environment.

Shopping Practices

In order to discuss the tactics that Muslim women employ in Montreal, it is first important to understand where they shop and how they navigate the consumer sphere. Based on the responses that most of my participants outlined in terms of dress and modesty, one might think there were no options for them to purchase at stores in Montreal. All three criteria—opaque, long, and loose—that many of these Muslim women adhere to result in clothing that is not easily available from mainstream stores in Montreal. There are a few Muslim clothing stores in Montreal and online, but not many participants shop at these venues. The stores that these women mentioned frequenting included Zara, Mango, H&M, Winners, The Bay, Smart Set, Arias, Forever 21, Old Navy, Costa Blanca, Simon's, Urban Outfitters, Urban Planet, Ardene, Carrefour Lavalle, BCBG, Tommy Hilfiger, Sirens Stitches, Urban Behaviour, Boutique 1861, Olivia, Tristan, independent stores in Morocco and Paris, Bash, Club Monaco, Banana Republic, Gap, Bedo, and The Bay. Some of the women shop online and have friends who bring back clothes from Muslim-majority countries, and there were a few who go to Islamic clothing stores. Some of these Islamic clothing stores included N-ti, Boutique Hijabi, Modesty Wear (online store), a store on Fleury St.[27], El Kota, and El-Hiyada. Other participants were aware of Islamic clothing stores, including Khadija Style, Al-Andalus, but do not shop in them. Sally said that she lives in an Orthodox Jewish neighbourhood and goes to the Covered Girl Clothing store. Many of my participants were not interested in shopping at Islamic clothing stores, or they visited these stores only to purchase items they cannot find at mainstream stores, including caps for underneath their headscarf, sleeves, turtle necks, and scarves. The mainstream stores where these women shop are not necessarily known for their long, opaque, loose-fitting clothing, nor does the clothing in these stores resemble the abaya or burqa, two items strongly associated with what is commonly referred to as Muslim dress by Western media. Yet, these are not always the styles of clothing preferred by my participants. As Wurood notes,

> *I don't really like the clothes that they usually bring back in those stores are like, like I mentioned, it's from another country usually,*

[27] Participant could not remember the name of the store on Fleury St.

> *and so, I guess they fit the "hijab bill," but um, they're not really my style. I don't know, they're just different. Some people like them, some people don't. I just don't.* (Wurood)

The choice to shop at mainstream clothing stores versus Islamic clothing stores was made for a variety of reasons. Mrouj remarked that she does not like the styles that Islamic clothing stores carry because they are not fashionable. Imane commented that she prefers stores for what she described as young people; for many, the clothing in Islamic stores is often associated with older women. There was also a concern that the clothing in Islamic clothing stores is more in keeping with the cultural styles of and from Muslim-majority countries, which these women were generally not interested in wearing. Some participants mentioned wanting to shop at stores that are cheap and have sales. Many of my participants were students, and so price was an important factor for them, and sometimes Islamic clothing stores were more expensive. Finally, Islamic clothing stores in Montreal are harder to find and are more isolated from each other than mainstream clothing stores, many of which are concentrated in a particular location, such as Saint Catherine street downtown. More of an effort was involved in finding and entering Islamic clothing stores than for more accessible, cheaper, youthful, and trendy mainstream stores. Sally stated that she does not feel comfortable shopping at Islamic clothing stores because she feels out of place and judged, as she is not "visibly Muslim." She finds it easier to shop at mainstream stores, where she does not feel the same judgment.

However, there were also participants who had reasons for not wanting to wear clothing from mainstream stores. For example, both Kenza and Marie stated that she does not shop at American Apparel because the company has been criticized for its advertisements. Kenza also stated that she does not like to shop at clothing stores that use sweatshops (see Meyers, 2004), which is a much more difficult standard taking into account how many of the stores named above usually employ sweatshops.

The women in my study shop anywhere from two to three times a week to one to two times a month. Many of them shop alone, find what they need, and leave. Sometimes they shop solely for practical reasons; other times, they shop with friends and sisters as a social activity. The few married participants stated that at times they shop with their husbands, and at times they shop for "retail therapy." One participant stated that she shops for specific seasons, such as when she is going on a trip, to help friends with their shopping, and to accommodate change in

size (for example, weight loss, weight gain, pregnancy, etc.). Yasmin mentioned that her shopping habits have changed over the course of her life. When she was younger, shopping was a social activity, something she did for fun, but now that she is older, more financially responsible for herself, and has less money to spend on entertainment, shopping is more of a practical activity, during which she finds what she needs, buys it, and leaves.

Ultimately, the choice between patronizing mainstream clothing stores or Islamic clothing stores is not a choice between assimilating into or resisting the West. In fact, many of these Muslim women were mixing and matching between the two types of stores for different purposes. Different specialized items like caps for under the headscarf were purchased at Islamic clothing stores, but they were mixed and matched with clothing found at mainstream clothing stores. Furthermore, other factors including style preferences, price, location, and socializing with friends came into play much more than simply wanting to wear a cultural dress or making purchases at Islamic clothing stores. While some participants stated they like to support Islamic clothing stores and local businesses, these women identified other factors as well. They are not only *Muslim* women: they are also young women, students, and mothers, and many of them grew up in Quebec. Where they shop is a reflection of all of these elements.

The high number of times some of these women shop per month is to see what is available and what they can do with what they find. Since these mainstream clothing stores do not generally carry clothing that fits the three modesty criteria, the question is, what are Muslim women wearing? If they are going to Zara and Tommy Hilfiger, for example, to shop for loose clothing, shirts that are long enough to cover their curves, long sleeves, and non-transparent clothes, then they may encounter difficulty finding these items. Clothing carried in Islamic clothing stores, on the other hand, fits the three criteria but does not have the style, price, and accessibility these women desire. So, the question is, what are they doing? How do they make appropriate the clothing they are interested in wearing within the guidelines they have defined for themselves? This is where du Gay et al.'s (1997) concept of the "third way" of understanding consumption comes into play. The question is not only, where are these women shopping, but also what do they do with the clothing that they have purchased? How are their clothes being adapted post-purchase, and how are these women creating these adaptations and developing them over the course of their lives?

Tricks of the Trade

Every once and in a while, my sister and I have a discussion about our clothes in which one of us says, "I can't believe what I used to do for clothes before I figured *this* out." When I was growing up, the Muslim community in Charlottetown was quite small, and the Internet had not yet become the vast ocean of consumerism that it is today. My sister and I adapted our clothing to our modesty guidelines by wearing men's t-shirts, stretching sweaters to make them longer, putting t-shirts underneath short long-sleeved tops, and wearing long skirts with short tops, to what we discovered today which are similar to the tactics my participants created. Developing these tactics with what was available was never easy and with so few Muslims around, we had to figure out ideas from limited sources. I use the terms "Tricks of the Trade" in order to outline and expand on the ways Muslim women develop their "tactics" within the consumer "strategy" in Montreal. "Tricks of the Trade" are the ways my participants discuss the different tactics that Muslim women use in order to dress modestly with the clothing available to them in Montreal. The way these Muslim women dress is something that is created, developed, and learned throughout their lives. This is how they are able to shop at mainstream clothing stores on Saint Catherine street and still dress in ways that they feel are appropriate. This is also how "they escaped it without leaving it" as de Certeau describes it. Some Muslim women enjoy the process of challenging the norm with what they wear. As Bouchra explains it:

> *And even it's becoming trendy, as I said, being different has become the norm and we're just like, you know, who are we. Being hipsters, and like, different, but at the same time all the same, or the trend, so that's interesting in a way. And related to Muslim women, because we're still very confused about what Muslim women, what being a Muslim woman is. We're still playing around with the reappropriation, challenging the order, trying to find the, we're growing, you know, towards a kind of better definition of who we are. And, at the same time, we're, we won't ever like be one kind of fixed identity and that's interesting 'cause it's so much dependent upon the context, upon the time, the space, everything, the people you meet.*

Trick of the Trade: Hijabify It![28]

> *You get the eye for it. You just look at it and you know and, like, "hijabify" it!* (Marie)

> *Slowly you start adjusting and you start learning and you start seeing how you can do things and improvise.* (Sorouja)

In one of my first interviews, I asked Wurood about the inspiration for her clothing and she said that when she sees people walking on the street, she gets ideas even if the clothing does not fit in with her guidelines. As she put it, "*I don't get inspired sometimes by what I see someone wear, but automatically the first thing I think of is, how can I make that hijab? Can you make that hijab? And if you can, where can you get it, you know?*" Making something "hijab" or, as I discovered the verb, *to hijabify*, is the key to how these Muslim women shop at mainstream stores while still maintaining their modesty guidelines: altering clothing so that it can be worn in a modest way. An article in *The Age* entitled "Young Designer 'Hijabifying' Melbourne,' describes it as "[a] growing phenomenon," and that "the practice of adapting fashion-forward clothing to make it more modest has been dubbed 'hijabifying'" (Ross, 2013, para. 4). The author, Annabel Ross, interviewed a Muslim Australian designer named Zulfiye, who practices hijabifying as, "a way to indulge her passion for fashion, while presenting the hijab as anything but a symbol of oppression" (Ross, 2013, para. 11). Similarly, Tasneem Chopra, a curator for the "Faith, fashion, fusion: Muslim women's style in Australia," exhibit at the Western Australian Museum referred to hijabifying an outfit in reference to the creativity of one of the designers: "she sees an amazing outfit, she really wants to wear it and the first thing she thinks of is, 'How can I hijabify that?'" (New Islamic fashion exhibition challenges stereotypes, 2013, para. 18). This term has become a way to define a key tactic for Muslim women.

In my interviews, many of my participants discussed how they hijabify their outfits, using different tricks they have learned, and how they learned them. While one participant mentioned that some Muslim women make their own clothes, most participants relied on the marketplace in order to find their clothes. These are these tactics that demonstrate the agency that Muslim women have when they are shopping and how they use the available material to maintain their

[28] There were two participants who did not adhere to the guidelines of modest dress that the other participants identified with, so I have not included their answers in this section, but address them later.

guidelines. While "hijab" means "to cover" in Arabic, when these Muslim women "hijabify" their clothing, it relates to much more than their headscarf; it is about their entire outfit.

Trick of the Trade: Layers

> *I'm wearing three layers.* (Mrouj)
>
> *If I buy a top I would like chiffon, but it's layered so it's not transparent, it's layered long. You can wear those with pants 'cause they're long.* (Sorouja)

A major general technique used by most of the Muslim women I spoke to was the layered look. Layers can work to adjust low necklines, create long tops, make something transparent opaque, give sleeves to something sleeveless, and invent and create modest outfits out of clothes that were meant to be tight and short. Layering their clothing allows women to shop for styles and prices and it opens up doors for them to access clothing from some of the stores where otherwise they would not have many options. Ultimately, many Muslim women have a closet full of clothes of different lengths and fabrics, all to be worn and adapted in ways that were not intended by their marketing. At times this adaptation can be as easy as buying an item of clothing in a larger size. Wurood mentioned that oftentimes clothes are designed to be tight, and so instead of getting a size small, she will purchase the item in a medium or large size instead. Buying a larger size means the item of clothing will not be as tight on her body, it may be longer, and if it has sleeves, then that is one less layer she will have to wear.

Trick of the Trade: Scarves (They're Not Just to Cover your Hair)

> *Si des gens trouvent quelque chose de long il faut être très, très contente. Donc, pour le cou on a la chance, par exemple, on peut mettre le foulard et on peut cacher, même si c'est un peu décolleté, c'est pas grave on va mettre quelque chose en bas et puis on va mettre nos foulards on va, on va arranger.*(Amal)[29]

The minute the words "scarf" and "Muslim women" are uttered together, the immediate association is often that the scarf will cover the hair. The words also conjure up images of special scarves that are only worn for religious reasons. They might even, perhaps, have the connotation of being outside of the realm of consumerism. Mrouj mentioned that she does not

[29] Translation: If people find something long one must be very, very happy. So, for the neck we are lucky, for example, we can put the scarf and we can hide it, even if it's a bit low cut, it's okay we can put something underneath and then we can put our scarves, we'll fix it.

go to Islamic clothing stores to find scarves because there are many stores that sell scarves. Scarves are intended to be placed around the neck, often for the winter weather, but these same scarves can be placed on the head. However, Muslim women also use scarves to amend low-cut tops. If for some reason there is a top that is low cut, but fits other criteria, maybe it is long, maybe it has long sleeves, maybe it is opaque, the scarf works as a way to cover the chest and to hide cleavage.

Trick of the Trade: The Long Dress/Long Skirt

> *The strategy of just like finding, if you find a maxi dress and kind of have something over that doesn't have sleeves you kind of find a cardigan that goes with it.* (Yasmin)

The maxi dress recently came back into style a few seasons ago and was available in many stores; it offers an easy option for many women. Though the maxi has a long and wide skirt, the top of the dress usually has spaghetti straps and is low cut. Paired with a cardigan, the maxi dress is an easy option for Muslim women and is suitable for the summer weather, as it has few layers and the skirt allows the wearer to stay cool. One of my interviewees, Sima, stated that the long dress can also be paired with a shirt or pants. She showed me the long dress she was wearing which had slits that showed her legs. Instead of not wearing the dress, she paired it with leggings and even though it had no sleeves, she found a way around that as well: "*Puis ici il n'y a pas de manche, ben je mets un chandail en dessous, fait ça reste beau, mais c'est un style voilé.*"[30] Kenza stated that she likes wearing skirts or dresses: "*I think they're more modest, also I kind of like feeling like a princess."* Concerns about modesty were not the only factor for this participant in choosing her clothing; the dress makes her feel a certain way and she likes how she looks in it. Though long skirts are sometimes perceived as dowdy or matronly, this participant understood her long skirt to be princess-like. She saw the skirt as expressing a feminine identity that reflects her personality.

Trick of the Trade: The Short Dress

> *I think they are all dresses that I made tops, or some of them are made, you know, made at a certain length where you're supposed to wear leggings underneath them […] but they're all, I think they're all dresses.* (Yasmin)

[30] Translation: And here there are no sleeves, so I put a shirt underneath, so it stays pretty, but it's a veiled style.

The above conversation occurred during an interview when I asked a participant what her wardrobe was comprised of and she responded by staying that she had many long tops. When I asked her how many of her long tops were actually marketed as short dresses, her response was all of them. Short dresses probably seem counterintuitive to the modesty guidelines discussed earlier, but they have been my personal favourite tactic since high school. Long tops can be hard to find and are sometimes only available during certain seasons for short periods of time. Even when long tops are quite long, they do not always cover the body properly the way a short dress can. As Arij said of the benefits of the short dress, "*C'est sûr que tu vas chercher un chandail tu vas le trouver court, mais c'est comme, moi, moi je porte des robes.*"[31] She continued:

> *Ça dépend de comment tu perçois la chose. C'est sûr que quand tu vas chercher un chandail, puis tu le veux long, ça va pas être long parce que pour eux, un chandail n'est pas suppose d'être long, une robe est supposée être longue. Fait que nous, on porte des robes comme chandail puis ça va bien pour moi. Fait que, moi je trouve pas, trouver les trucs longs, non, ça c'est pas vraiment difficile pour moi.*[32]

Her comment demonstrates that when these Muslim women shop, they recognize that the items they are purchasing are *intended* to be worn certain ways and that they are adapting those items because the mainstream Western market does not offer clothing designed to meet Muslim women's needs. As she mentioned in her response, when she looks for a long top, she will probably not find one that is long enough because, in this particular market, most consumers do not buy tops that are long. However, short dresses are *intended* to cover the bum (in most cases). Arij clearly understands how the clothing is being sold to her, and the way that it is meant to be worn, yet she is making a decision not to wear it that way. She is consciously adapting the clothing regardless of its intended use. The short dress is a popular tactic because it can decrease the number of layers a woman needs to wear. As Wurood mentioned, "*You have to kind of adjust it in a way either make it longer on your own, or wear something on top, or wear something under, so it's all about finding what's in store and, you know, kind of modifying it a*

[31] Translation: It's certain that you will find a sweater that you will find short, but it's like, me, me I wear dresses.
[32] Translation: It depends on how you perceive the thing. It's certain that when you look for a sweater, and you want it long, it won't be long because for them, a sweater is not supposed to be long, a dress is supposed to be long. We, we wear dresses likes sweaters and that works for me. Me, I don't find, find long things, no, that's not really hard for me.

little bit to make it more 'religious.'" Yasmin combined the tactic of the short skirt, but had her own stipulations for how this type of tactic should be paired with other clothing:

> *I feel like the dress needs to be at a certain length, you know or the blouse needs to be at a certain length. But I really like what the really wide pants is you can, you know, your option is because they're so wide they show nothing, you know, they're basically like a skirt. You can actually go for a little shorter something above the knee level, but I usually stay around the knee level in terms of dresses and or tunics and that's sometimes a challenge to find.*

For Yasmin, a top had to go at least to her knee; this was a length she was comfortable with in being modest. However, if a top or short dress was shorter than that, she was comfortable matching it with a pair of wide pants that would also avoid showing any curves. This is not a guideline that it written in the Qu'ran, it is a decision she is making in regards to the kind of clothing she wants to wear. She is always re-negotiating and changing her tactic based on what is available to her and what makes her comfortable. As she mentioned, it can be difficult to find short dresses that go at least to the knee, as hem lines often rise and fall depending on the season and style, and that for this participant, a short dress was not necessarily modest enough, even if paired with pants. Wide pants were another tactic that aided in mixing and matching clothes to create outfits.

Trick of the Trade: The Long Top/Tunic

> *Généralement quand je porte une jupe, je porte quelque chose de beaucoup plus court, mais là je porte quelque chose de long parce que la jupe, elle est en jersey puis le jersey ça colle.* (Zineb)[33]

The purpose of these tactics is to hide curves and form. If a woman is wearing a long skirt, there is no need for a long top. A long top is appropriate with pants. However, Zineb, quoted above, wore a long top with her long skirt, which she said she normally does not do, but because of the fabric of the skirt, she decided to wear a long top. Jersey tends to cling to the body and is not as modest as she would like it to be, so she paired it with a long top in order to hide her curves. Though long tops can be the hardest item to find, Yasmin stated that lately tunics have been trendy, which serves as a perfect opportunity for Muslim women to find long tops.

[33] Translation: Generally, when I wear a skirt, I wear something much shorter, but now I'm wearing something long because the skirt, it's jersey, and jersey sticks.

Trick of the Trade: The Tank Top

> *You can buy tank tops, but hijabify it with, like, a cardigan.* (Kenza)

> *All the short tank tops that I wear would look perfect on the skirt and a long sleeve under or like a cardigan.* (Kenza)

The tank top may seem the complete opposite of the long top. A tank top does not cover much, and at first glance for a Muslim woman who wants to wear modest clothing, the role of the tank top may seem somewhat of a contradiction. A tank top can be worn with a cardigan or over a shirt it with long sleeves. The tank top can be paired with a transparent shirt and longer tank tops can be worn underneath a short long-sleeved shirt to add length.

Trick of the Trade: The Cardigan

> *The best thing to do is to get a long cardigan. So, a long cardigan, or a nice long jacket kind of. So, I mean if there's something you like and it's, maybe there's a cut in the back, or something you just have a nice long cardigan and then it all flows.* (Sorouja)

For Sorouja, the cardigan fixed many problems. If a dress was open in the back or if a shirt had no sleeves, the cardigan was a good option for coverage. Several participants mentioned the usefulness of cardigans, and not just for coverage.

Trick of the Trade: But aren't you hot?

> *Yes, yes, most of the time, when I, like, shopping for the winter, or for the summer I'm like concerned about the fabric and the, how light it is and these things.* (Mrouj)

Many of my participants mentioned another major concern for Muslim women in regards to dress: heat. I have been asked many times in my life, especially in the summer, "Aren't you hot?" The idea that Muslim women do not take environmental concerns into consideration when making decisions about their dress ignores the details that Muslim women do take into account. There is also the flip side to this notion – that Muslim women might disregard their religious principles due to weather-related factors. One of the ways many Muslim women combat the issue of heat is with the type of fabric they wear in the summer versus in the winter. Kenza stated that she would not wear a wool cardigan in the summertime. Instead, she wears a cotton cardigan that is much lighter during the hot summer months. Marie stated that she wears a three-

quarter length sleeved jacket with a sleeved shirt underneath, which she finds cooler during the summer.

While wearing long dresses and skirts are some of the tactics that many Muslim women use in their daily lives, the weather is also taken into account when making decisions about how to dress. Many of my participants only wear long skirts and dresses in the summertime, since it is cooler, but will avoid wearing skirts and will instead wear pants in the winter:

> *I think winter time I often go for pants more than dresses and skirts just because I find, first of all it's cold, and skirts for some reason, I feel like they get dirty really quick and all the slush and disgusting stuff.* (Yasmin)

Two factors come together in her decision: concern with wanting to stay warm during the winter and care about not wanting her clothes to get dirty, which can be difficult with long skirts during a Montreal winter. Kenza stated that she wears pants in the winter because she can tuck the pant leg into her boots to keep her pants out of the slush, something she cannot do with a dress or a skirt.

These weather-related concerns are practical. Yasmin, who prefers to wear wide pants and skirts in the summer, recognizes that they are not always practical even during the summer months. She spoke about other activities in which she takes part, specifically biking, noting how wide pants and long skirts can be dangerous during this activity, as they may become caught in the chain. Instead of refraining from this activity, she wears pants that are more suitable. Her example and choices demonstrate that these Muslim women have complex lives where modesty, the weather, and their aesthetic concerns influence the kinds of dress decisions they make. This is similar to Marjorie Kelly's (2010) article about her study of Muslim women in Kuwait, which showed how contextual factors influenced Muslim women's decisions regarding their dress. The contexts of the activities Muslim women take part in, along with the seasonal context, are not ignored by Muslim women. Furthermore, unlike the notion that Muslim women's dress is made to be difficult to move in and causes a barrier to their full participation in Western life, these Muslim women are constantly changing their dress in order to avoid difficulties that might impede them taking part in their daily activities.

Another practical style of dress, which may be surprising, turned out to be the abaya. This came as a surprise even to me, as I did not anticipate many of my participants as identifying the abaya as practical. This was one moment in which I, as a Muslim woman, had to ignore my

own instincts around dress in order to better understand a perspective that I did not share. Even though most of tactics discussed above describe how Muslim women use and adapt mainstream clothing to suit their modesty guidelines, this does not mean that the abaya is oppositional to these seemingly Western styles of dress or that there is no purpose for the abaya. However, several participants who also wear the abaya at times discussed how easy a style of dress it is to wear. Yousra stated that the abaya was comfortable and she could wear her pyjamas, leggings, or a camisole underneath and still look distinguished. Several participants described it as practical and easy. In popular media, the abaya is represented as an oppressive style of dress that makes it difficult to move. In contrast, Yasmin discussed how the abaya actually allows a woman to wear only one layer: "*That's kind of the idea of the abaya, you know, if I don't feel like mixing and matching and just go for that one layer, right?*" Sorouja stated that when she started wearing the headscarf, she asked her friends what she should do for clothes. They suggested the abaya: "*Because I'm going to run out of trying to mix and match at one point, so sometimes the abaya is just an easy thing to just pull on and go out*." Her statement demonstrates that while these Muslim women have discovered their own ways to dress and make do with what is available in Western market, they have not completely turned their backs on certain styles of dress that are more traditional and cultural, and that serve a function. Those styles are still part of their wardrobes. They may not be worn all the time, but they still serve a purpose.

Trick of the Trade: Sharing Ideas

It takes skill for a Muslim woman to dress modestly in the West. These tactics are developed throughout a woman's life and are learned. One way in which Muslim women discover and build on these tactics is through their friendships with other Muslim women. As Yasmin stated,

> *I think often I would see something, you know, I would see friends wear something and I would ask them how did, did they combine things. I think often if I don't ask them or if I see it on the street I'll just see the look and I'll get inspired by that. I think for me that's really fashion, it's what's going on with other Muslim sisters who I have the same thought process as I, I have, right? And I let myself get inspired by that.*

Many participants stated that they see what other Muslim women are wearing in order to get ideas themselves. Sally, who does not wear the headscarf but who has her own standards for

modesty, said she shares more ideas with her roommate than her roommate shares with her. She says that she helps because she "*just sort of see[s] what's out there*" and that helps to guide her friend.

Some discussed visiting Muslim fashion blogs and finding inspiration from them, especially now that blogs are becoming more and more plentiful. Through social media, the community of female Muslim stylists has grown. For example, in the article "Melbourne's 'Faith, Fashion, Fusion' Exhibition Celebrates Style of Australia's Muslim Women," Tasneem Chopra discussed how she now gets ideas from Muslim women outside of Australia: "This morning I got up and I looked at my Instagram and saw somebody—I think maybe she was in Poland—she had a particular style of hijab and I just copied that and put it on" (Arnott, 2013, para. 36). Muslim women are finding all kinds of ways to share their tricks of the trade with each other.

While these participants have described how they use mainstream stores in Montreal to do their shopping, the way they adapt their clothing demonstrates how they are making new meaning out of the products they consume. However, the way they share their ideas shows that Muslim women are not only looking to the mainstream fashion industry for inspiration to copy or expand on, or even the emerging Islamic fashion industry for that matter, to be fashionable. Muslim women are also looking to each other for style tips and fashion inspiration.

Creating a network of Muslim women who understand the tactics and can share ideas is important in a market where women are pressured to dress in form-fitting and revealing clothing. There is a lack of understanding about what Muslim women need and how they wear their clothing. I have had this experience myself, where I tried on clothing the way I was going to wear it, which was not the way it was marketed or designed, only to be told by the employee at the store that I was not wearing the particular garment correctly and that was why it did not fit. These kinds of experiences can be frustrating. Sally recounted the story of her search for a wedding dress and how her friends responded to a particular dress that she found:

> *When I was getting married a couple of years ago, I tried on a dress that I really liked and it was shorter than I would usually wear and, but it was like really pretty and everyone was like, oh it looks really nice on you. And I, was tempted to purchase it and I actually did purchase it and then I came home, I was like, I can't wear this, and I knew that if I wore it I'd be really uncomfortable and it just, I just didn't want to live with that and I returned it.*

> *And you know, and especially, I'm relatively, like, people would define me as being thin, right, so people would say like oh, you can wear whatever you want and all these kinds of things and you wear like looser clothing so nobody sees certain things and like there's always been that, it's been a recent pressure, […] I still maintain my guidelines, even if I know I can get away with certain things like they won't look as whatever, as they would have like, a couple of years ago I still, no, it doesn't matter 'cause it's still you at the end of the day, like, you're the one who has to live with the decision, right.*

Sally illustrates how her guidelines were not in line with the ideals of her friends, who were encouraging her to buy something that she did not find comfortable. Her friends could have been basing their aesthetic preference for her dress on cultural ideals that emphasize showing skin and revealing the form of the body. Furthermore, she described how others regard her clothing as strange because they think that since she has a thin body, she should want to flaunt it. The Muslim women who participated in this study deal with expectations based on the body and how it is viewed and valued in a Western context. A woman with a thin body should want to expose it, and the fact that these women are doing the opposite places them at odds with cultural values regarding women and beauty, a position which is at times difficult for members of the dominant population to understand.

Trick of the Trade: Stocking Up

As model and host Heidi Klum said on *Project Runway*, "In fashion, one day you're in, and the next, you're out." Even with all these tactics at their disposal, Muslim women still have periods where certain items are easier to find than others. Certain items are trendy one year and not the next, and this cycle can be difficult for Muslim women. As for example, Yasmin, who stated she uses maxi dresses as a tactic for wearing long clothing, found there is not always a guarantee that she will be able to find maxi dresses each summer at the stores. Her solution to the problem was to buy more than one when they are available so that she knew she would be covered for seasons to come: "*I remember a few years ago, it was impossible to find long dresses, you know, maxi dresses and you know. I had a friend who's like, yeah, I've been stocking up everywhere I find a long dress I'm buying it, I don't care*." The participant mentioned that she received a tip from a Muslim friend to purchase multiple items at once, to avoid being caught without any suitable clothes in another season. Reem discussed buying items

she likes in different colours. Even items like cardigans are sometimes not appropriate, and finding perfect cardigans may only happen occasionally. Sally described this process:

> *Cardigans, longer cardigans. So, for example, like, years ago you could only find short cardigans, right, but then that wouldn't cover your ass, right. So, it's like and that's a huge thing for me and it's so weird, it's just, it's whatever. It's important and so or like a longer shirt like the one I'm wearing today would cover it, right, but you couldn't find these kinds of shirts before and even to buy this shirt I had to go out of my way to purchase it, and a lot of times, I hate saying this, but I find that conservative clothing that is like of good quality is a lot more expensive than non-conservative clothing. I find myself having to shop at, like, you know if I'm in Simon's like I can't buy that much stuff downstairs and I have to go upstairs into the icon section for women's clothing that is more expensive, it's kind of ridiculous.*

There are times when the process of finding clothes that fit modesty guidelines is not easy and adapting the clothing after purchase is not always appropriate or workable. There are times when shopping at different stores and paying more for the clothing is necessary in order to have something to wear. Depending on the market, finding clothes to buy is not always a given for these Muslim women even with the creative tactics they have developed.

Muslim Women as Tacticians

In their book *The Sari*, Mukulika Banerjee and Daniel Miller (2003) write that they intend to discuss the sari "not as an object of clothing, but as a *lived* garment" (p.1, emphasis in original). Banerjee and Miller understand clothing, and in this case the sari, as a personal experience that, seen as an object, erases the living and process from the wearer for whom the garment is more than something that covers the body. They further state that "[a] catalogue of fabrics and designs conveys nothing of the anxiety and careful thought involved in selecting what we wear, the sense it brings us of our own bodies, of who we are and who we might become" (p.1). This applies to the Muslim women who took part in this study as their clothing reflects a fairly sophisticated process of creating, developing, and adapting their tactics to reflect their religion, personality, lifestyle, and experience in the world. Simply analyzing Muslim women's clothing from the outside in ignores the complexities of the choices these women make and the discipline they have to dress in this market. This process, however, can also be a frustrating and challenging one.

> *Yeah, I think I've gone through a long period of that, I think the things that I like, or the things I find or are appropriate for me or my taste and my modesty, they're often, when they're not at my price range, I really get, you know, I often tend to kind of get frustrated and leave the shopping because it's, it's really, I find it's a draining process when you're not able to find what you're looking for and when you can't just go for anything in the shop. You actually have to take some time to think of how things will work in your wardrobe. I think I have had times like that.* (Yasmin)

While it could be argued that when Muslim women wear "Western" clothing, they are buying into the Western consumer market, or that Muslim women are assimilating into the West, I argue that Muslim women are dressing in a way that is subversive and that demonstrates a sense of agency. They cultivate and create their own particular identities by using what is available in the market while still maintaining their principles. By using this third way of consumption, these Muslim women are not simply accepting what is available and wearing Western clothing as intended; rather, by adapting Western clothing to fit their personal dress guidelines, they are actively making choices about their own consumption that may counter dominant Western ideals.

There are many factors involved in these choices rather than simply conforming to an Eastern or Western ideal. These Muslim women have financial, aesthetic, practical, and environmental concerns that factor in their decisions. They are influenced in many ways, especially when they encounter difficulties in finding clothes. However, through these difficulties, they have developed their own ways to cope with a market that does not meet their needs, and to exist within this sphere.

Conclusion

For many of my participants who identified as practicing Muslims, negotiation and navigation through the Montreal context is an everyday occurrence. Between what they eat and where they go, these Muslim women are constantly making decisions about what is appropriate and what goes against their beliefs. Dress is one instance in which this navigation and negotiation is visible. But in making it so visible, there can be misinterpretations from those who do not understand why someone with a thin figure or who seems conventionally attractive would not want to wear clothing that is celebrated in North American culture. In this respect, finding salespeople who understand the specific needs of Muslim women who choose to dress modestly

is not always an available option. Sharing ideas and getting help from other Muslim women who have similar concerns and guidelines is a major benefit.

Finally, as this chapter demonstrates, the women do not reject a cultural dress like the abaya. There are times when, for convenience, weather-related issues, as a break from mixing and matching, or out of need, some of these participants wear the abaya. However, the abaya was not described as an oppressive form of black dress that women wear out of obligation. These women included the abaya as in their wardrobe for different reasons, including simply practical purposes. This is another example of how these women are mixing and matching all the clothing options they have available, including different cultural dress and styles, to make their wardrobes work for them.

Ultimately, these Muslim women understand that they are Othered within the Montreal context and that many people within the majority society see them as oppressed; however, these representations, which are all too familiar, did not always factor into their dress decisions. While some participants stated that they were aware of how they were being perceived, and that at times they wanted to break stereotypes, for the most part they were not making decisions to try to assimilate or appear non-threatening. Rather, they made decisions based on what clothing they had available, the styles they enjoyed wearing, and what made them comfortable. If anything, they put more emphasis on their behaviour and how they treat people in order to change opinions about Islam. For them, behaviour is part of the modest way that they dress.

The tactics described above are one way in which Muslim women make use of the Montreal context to take part in consumption. While Tarlo (2007b) cites a more burgeoning Islamic shopping context in London, Montreal is still in its infancy. The next chapter explores one Islamic clothing store in Montreal, N-ti. The store, which began as a tactic by the owner, slowly became a strategy by evolving into a stand-alone boutique. The tactics outlined above are then incorporated into the design of the store, but the negotiations do not stop there.

Chapter 6:
Fashion and N-ti Fashion: Creating an Islamic Clothing Store in Montreal

Something about this feels.....just odd.
-Internet Commentator, Fashionista

Religion and Consumption

In July 2014, DKNY launched a Ramadan collection. The collection was put together by Yalda Golsfharifi, a fashion editor, and Tamara al Gabbani, a fashion designer (Shah, 2014, par. 1). They also served as the face of the campaign. The collection was meant to fuse together Islamic practices associated with the holy month of Ramadan, during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, with style and fashion. As Bina Shah noted in *The Independent*, "No fashion faux pas here: everything in the collection is beautiful—and halal" (Shah, 2014, par. 3). While the collection was only available to be sold in the Middle East (Vogue.in, 2014, par. 2), it sparked interest in the West. One commenter on the fashion website *Fashionista* commented about the collection stating that "[s]omething about this feels.....*just odd*" (Edwards, 2014). This comment demonstrates how the concepts of Islam and fashion appear to be at odds, but even more so, it shows that the institutionalization of Islamic fashion seems even more bizarre. This DKNY collection came out while I was in the process of writing this dissertation and this comment on the story on the website *Fashionista*, was similar to comments I have received when people would ask me about my topic.

One reason that this topic may seem "just odd" could be that religion does not seem to go hand-in-hand with consumerism; however, there is a long history of religious goods and artifacts being bought and sold in the marketplace. In her chapter "Christian Retailing," Colleen McDannell (1995) discusses how the thought of Christianity entering the retail world is sometimes met with derision, "[c]ritics blithely denounce the whole environment as indicative of how a commercial American mentality has invaded the inner sanctum of religion. They complain about how such products reduce Christianity to the trivial and reflect how profit directs

piety" (1995, p. 222). McDannell queries the motives of consumers who purchase such goods. What happens to the religious nature of products that are bought and sold in stores? In terms of Islamic consumption, there is also the cultural impact to be considered as well, since Islam and the West are constructed as antithetical to one another; adaptations of Islamic consumption to appear Western are often considered as signs of assimilation, appeasement or, by contrast, anti-Islamic. In the introduction to the collection *Muslim Societies in the Age of Mass Consumption*, Johanna Pink (2010) claims that globalization is not a singular process from the West that is imposed on the rest of the country (pp. ix-x). Instead she argues for the concept of glocalization, which she describes as an interaction between the global and the local (p. x). Her approach speaks to the ways in which brands are adapted specifically for Muslim consumers. For example, she cites dolls, clothing, and food as symbols "that Muslims [are] increasingly seek[ing] to define and express their distinct identity through the consumption of 'Islamic' commodities" (2010, p. xi). My research pursues this perspective to understand how Islamic consumerism operates through a case study of N-ti, a chain of Islamic clothing stores in Canada and the United States.

In this chapter, I discuss how N-ti operates and the kinds of struggle that occur when religious goods and associated artifacts such as clothing enter into a commercial nexus. The question of how N-ti deals with branding and yet maintains its identity as a distinctly Muslim business is discussed. Finally, I examine how N-ti serves as an example of glocalization—bringing the global and local together – in a format that is resonant with the particular cultural milieu in which it is located and the specific clientele it serves.

N-ti: An Introduction

I first heard about N-ti, through my sister who lives in Ontario. She went to an Islamic convention and told my mother and me about this business called N-ti where she had purchased some clothing. My sister mentioned that the business had a location in Montreal. When my mother came to Montreal during her

Figure 17: N-ti Store Front-830 Decarie Blvd.

March break, we decided to go and see it. N-ti was located at the end of the orange metro line in St. Laurent at 830 Decarie Blvd. While there are shops, cafés, and even larger drug and grocery stores in the area, it is not exactly a major consumer area. This neighbourhood does not have the same traffic as the popular and populous Saint Catherine Street in the downtown core. The shop was a small store with an awning on which the name "N-ti" was spelled out. Any consumer would be greeted by a store window displaying mannequins sporting N-ti merchandise. The store reflected more of a boutique style than a chain store. My first thoughts about N-ti were how difficult it must have been to start such and maintain this kind of business. I wondered about the challenge of finding a way to appeal to Muslim women who are a portion of the Muslim population which in itself is a minority group. Moreover, the Muslim population in Montreal and Quebec is relatively scattered and highly diverse with many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and therefore, varied perspectives on Islam and what comprises Islamic dress.

As mentioned previously, there is no one singular Muslim woman, so if N-ti's brand is meant to cater to Muslim women, what does this mean in relation to the diverse ways in which my interviewees perceived themselves? Further, given that N-ti represents an institutionalization of Muslim fashion, how does Muslim fashion which is somewhat marginalized and more of a tactical response, become part of the institution? Does it change when it enters the institution? How does it operate within this new sphere? In his article "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life," Lev Manovich (2009) takes up de Certeau's concept, but argues that "[s]trategies and tactics are now often closely linked in an interactive relationship, and often their features are reversed" (p. 323). While Manovich uses social media platforms as a means to demonstrate de Certeau's definition of "strategies," in which a structure is imposed upon individuals who then must navigate it, strategies operate differently today, as they are now more fluid and flexible (p. 325).

In taking up Manovich's claim, my focus here is on how the clothing store N-ti began its journey from the world of the tactic and entered into the world of the strategy. This chapter, thus, focuses on the store's history, branding, activities, employees, and customers. My analysis illustrates how the N-ti brand attempts to offer a way of connecting and engaging with Canadian culture in a way that does not automatically reject Islam, and how, in the space of the store, concepts like neoliberalism, Islam, fashion, and identity are articulated and engaged. I argue that

the N-t brand is specifically marketed to Muslim women who identify culturally with Canada, but, as with Manovich's deployment of "strategies," I analyze how the owner, employees, and customers constantly negotiate and re-interpret this identity.

Case Study: N-ti

In my initial plans for this project, I intended to perform fieldwork at more than one store. I initially found four Islamic stores in Montreal, three with physical locations and one online store based in Montreal. However, in the process of beginning my fieldwork, three of the stores either moved locations, shut down, or were difficult to contact. N-ti was the only store I could get in touch with and that agreed to allow me to perform fieldwork on site. Throughout the process of my fieldwork and analysis, I found that using N-ti as a case study served as a rich site for investigation. As Robert K. Yin (2003) argues, "[t]he distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomenon. In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (2003, p. 2). As a result, this method allows for the inclusion of many different aspects of the case for analysis (Yin, 2003, pp. 13-14).

My intention in using N-ti as a case study was to focus on how the context of the boutique lent itself to the larger discussion about female Muslim identity in Montreal, as well as consumerism. Throughout my analysis of the N-ti brand and day-to-day business affairs, I began to note that the design, merchandising, and manufacturing of clothing were just as pertinent to my study as the interactions in the store, as well as the online presence and advertising materials of the store. Hence, using N-ti as a specific case study permits me to address much broader issues relevant to discussing female Islamic identity in the West, while also including the intricacies particular to the N-ti environment.

I conducted participant observation in the store, and subsequently interviewed the store owner and employees for a period of one month (November 4th to December 6th, 2013). In order to conduct the participant observation, I worked as a retail salesperson with another employee in an unpaid capacity. When I started my work at N-ti, there were five employees at the Montreal store. All the employees were Muslim women. I completed 11 visits to the store comprising a total of 42 hours. During this time, I interviewed five employees and the owner. I learned how to use the cash register system to make a sale, folded merchandise, helped customers find items,

and helped shelve the new inventory of merchandise. Generally, I had more of a chance to participate and engage the customers when more than one customer came in at the same time. I was never officially put on the schedule and always worked with another employee. As I was not officially hired for this position, I made my own schedule for when I would participate at the store. My interviews with the employees took place at N-ti during the time when there were no customers present. I approached the interviews as a member of the Muslim community as well as PhD student. I became familiar with a few of the employees fairly well over the course of the interviews; I also knew one employee from seeing her around campus. The conversations were a mix of semi-structured interviews and questions about the daily occurrences at N-ti. For example, the employees showed me around the store, explained how the business was run, and described what their duties included.

Participant Observation/Everyday Observations

As a retail salesperson at N-ti, I was able to observe the activities and interactions that occurred in the store. I attempted to maintain a nonintrusive role, while taking part in the store's activities. As Reinard (2008) observes, "Rather than asking individuals to complete questionnaires reporting about themselves, as they might in a survey, participant observation researchers join with groups of people to observe them from within the group" (p. 245). He identifies this approach as naturalistic, since it allows for research on issues that would not come to the fore in the same way using other methodological approaches (2008, p. 246). While this approach may have been naturalistic in interactions with customers, I did find that the same could not be said for the employees I interviewed and with whom I worked. I noticed that, while I attempted to blend in with them during their activities at the store, my need for help from the employees and the time they took to show me around the store and explain their duties set up a relationship in which they were actively teaching me. Furthermore, while I spent hours at the store during which time I spoke with the employees and we discussed our lives outside of my research, I still felt as though the employees noticed my presence as a researcher, especially since when I started, individual employees were used to being the only person working in the store at a time. In that respect, my presence was certainly felt. Over the course of my research, there were several employees I saw more often than others and with whom I managed to develop

a rapport, but I still required their assistance for specific details when engaging with customers and merchandise.

During my participant observation I attempted to balance how much I participated with how much I observed. Julian Murchison (2010) states that it is important to know "what you are participating in, how you are participating, and with whom you are participating" (p. 87). I was cognizant of this process during my interviews, as mentioned in the introduction. The difference at N-ti was that for much of the process, I was observing without being able to verbalize my position. Furthermore, Murchison claims that being aware of your participation is important "[b]ecause it can be easy to become an inactive observer, it is important to check that you are participating and to think specifically about *how* you are participating" (p. 87, italics in original). The balance between participation and observation is important because in each action, participation or observation, the researcher receives and processes different kinds of information (Murchison, 2010, p. 88). A productive way to think about the balance between participation and observation is using the concept of the continuum. Corrine Glesne (2011) argues that the researcher's position as a participant observer may be situated differently on that continuum at different times during fieldwork (p. 64). During my fieldwork, my place on the continuum varied; however, I spent most of my time observing due to practical circumstances. There were times when there were no customers in the store, so I spent much of my time looking through the merchandise, taking pictures of the store, and taking notes. When customers did enter the store, the employee would interact with them immediately and I would attempt to participate along with both of them. If there was more than one customer in the store at a given time, I would spend more time interacting with the customer that the employee could not serve. These practical variables dictated where I stood on the participation and observation continuum.

Two positions on the continuum are: observer as participant and as full participant (Glesne, 2011, pp. 64-65). For the observer as participant, the challenge is to remain in an observer position, limiting engagement with those subjects being studied (Glesne, 2011, p. 64). The full participant takes part in the community that is being researched (Glesne, 2011, p. 65).

When it came to observations, I was aware of the tactics that Muslim women use (discussed in the previous chapter), and therefore, I made sure to note what Muslim women were doing with their clothing at the store. I observed what the consumers were most interested in purchasing at the store, paid attention to customers' and employees' wardrobes, as well as the

interactions between the customers and the employees. However, I also took particular note of ethnography, a term that David Machin (2002) defines as "the act of observing and listening to people as they go about their everyday lives in order that we can understand the way that they behave or think on their own terms" (p. 1). I tried to maintain somewhat of a distance when people entered the store in order to observe the seemingly un-extraordinary moments that could easily go unnoticed. Machin argues that "ethnography aims to give the researcher access to the way that people's lives are meaningful to them on their own terms" (p. 1). I feel it is important to note that my participant observation did not require me to immerse myself in a particular community on a daily basis, and I only participated in the store during my shifts, so my participation was limited as a result of pragmatic concerns and did not require me to remove myself from my familiar living conditions.

Data Collection

In order to collect and record the data during my fieldwork at N-ti, I took pictures and videos in addition to writing field notes after each shift. Reinard (2008) argues that, even with new technologies that are available to researchers during their fieldwork, field notes should not be underestimated (p. 269). He claims that "[s]olid ethnography and participant observation research requires that some effort to be systematic is employed in the process of taking and managing fieldnotes" (p. 269). Field notes need to include information that will be valuable to readers who are not familiar with the environment being studied. Murchison (2010) suggests field notes should include "observational detail (numbers, colors, alignment, and interaction, for instance)." He adds that "observation is not simply limited to watching and visual data. Good observational research and data make use of all five senses" (p. 88). During my fieldwork, I wrote field notes that included my observations of the store set-up, the merchandise, the background music, what interested customers, what customers were looking for, and the employees as they conducted their duties and interacted with customers. My field notes also included impressions I had of the store environment and how the elements of the music, clothing, colours, and the set-up all coalesced together in my experience of the store environment. I also kept track of how long I was there, with whom I was working, and if there were customers on that given day. Following the completion of my fieldwork, I wrote a short report bringing

together my initial observations and preliminary analysis in order to unpack the many elements N-ti offered to me.

Advantages/Disadvantages to Participant Observation

There are advantages and disadvantages to participant observation in the field, and they are often related to where observation and participation fall on the continuum for the researcher. There is a fear that complete participation will result in the researcher becoming overly involved in the community being researched, and/or that this will skew the interpretations and understanding of that community (Reinard, 2008, p. 252). At the other end of the spectrum, complete observational research may lead to "objective, unsympathetic, detached, and usually candid" reports of the research (Reinard, 2008, p. 252). However, this perspective neglects the positionality of the researcher in the field. The challenge of my research was to balance participation and observation in the field, and to recognize my positionality and subjectivity throughout the process. I told all the employees that I am Muslim and a doctoral student. If I had a chance to speak with customers, there were times when I would bring up the fact that I am Muslim, or sometimes they would ask. However, I did feel that I had to discuss my experiences as a Muslim woman to ensure the participants that I was part of the community and, since I was not wearing headscarf, I wanted to be sure that my identity was clear. Finally, while I was working at the store, I also prayed in the back of the store to complete my prayers on time, which is something the employees did as well.

N-ti Beginnings

Dikra Ait Nacere decided to create N-ti after she started to cover her hair in 2002 (Virk, 2014, para. 4). When she was looking for clothes to wear, she had difficulty finding anything that was appropriate. She says "I was looking for simple, practical clothes to wear, but I only found Muslim clothing that was imported from the Middle East that didn't go with my taste and culture as a Canadian Muslim" (Virk, 2014, para. 5). This, as demonstrated in previous chapters, is a common problem for Muslim women living in the West. Nacere began the company in the basement of her house in 2007, and opened the first store in 2008 (Virk, 2014, para. 5).

Nacere's sentiment about the intention for creating the company was echoed in the interviews with employees. Amal, an N-ti employee at the store, stated that "*le concept N-ti est venu parce qu'il y avait un besoin, parce que la femme ne trouvait pas des vêtements*

disponibles, puis pratiques pour sa vie quotidienne. Donc, c'est venu d'un besoin qui est réel et qui existe."[34] Khaoula, an N-ti employee, identified this need as coming from

> *a lack of Muslim, Islamic stores and I really, I congrats, like, it's really a good initiative that they started this. And everybody, when I talk to, they like, oh, where can I find, I don't find, I tell them, oh go to N-ti, there is stuff, yeah*."

Nurmohamed Joins N-ti

The current owner and CEO for N-ti Canada, Inc., is Fatma Nurmohamed. Nurmohamed's role is to manage N-ti's locations in Montreal (now closed down); Missaussaga, Ontario; and Malden, Massachusetts; to oversee the employees; and, manage the advertising. Nurmohamed began working in the Islamic fashion industry by designing headscarf pins around 1997. She was born in Uganda and came to Canada, when she was only 18 months old. When her family came to Canada they did not have much money, so they would buy ends from bargain stores and make their own clothes. Her father used to sew clothes, and Nurmohamed was inspired by that. She started out as a dental hygienist, but always had an entrepreneurial spirit. She said her passion stemmed from having difficulty finding clothes that conformed to her religious beliefs.

Nurmohamed started talking with Nacere around 2001 or 2002 and joined N-ti in 2009. Initially she worked at the mobile store in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area, and Dikra looked after the Montreal and Ottawa region. They opened a manufacturing facility with two machines and two staff people; at their peak they had eight machines and eight staff people. Nacere had the idea for N-ti when she started wearing the headscarf; Nurmohamed's interest came from financial reasons, as well as religious ones. Their tactics for creating their own clothing was the first step towards creating a strategy for making suitable clothing available to other Muslim women in the same position. N-ti's aim, then, is to provide a Canadian-Islamic brand to satisfy a need that is not being met for Canadian Muslim women in a market that neither caters to them, nor understands them.

Store Layout/Store Operations

[34] Translation: The concept for N-ti came about because there was a need, because women could not find clothing available and practical for everyday life. So, it came about out of a real need that exists.

When I started working at N-ti, the store had just changed its hours of operation. N-ti was closed on Mondays and open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m, and on Thursdays and Fridays from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The clothing was organized on the wall, with tables in the centre for the scarves. The store was a small space, with two dressing rooms in the back (where employees could also pray) and a soft lighting design. The small physical space and the specific niche market that the brand serves creates an atmosphere of a boutique rather than a large chain store designed to attract and support a large amount of consumer traffic. The store had an open concept; the only barriers were to the dressing rooms and the front desk, all of which created a welcoming atmosphere. There was also Arabic music playing. I asked the employees why this music was always playing, and I was told that someone had made the CD and they continued to use it. However, depending on who was in the store, the music would change.

Figure 19: N-ti Store Layout

Figure 18: N-ti Dressing Rooms

Figure 20: Scarves at N-ti

The store was extremely tidy. Any product that was purchased was immediately replaced; anything unfolded was quickly refolded and replaced. Colours and styles were grouped together, with the smallest sizes at the front and the largest sizes at the back. Only two of each of the sizes were displayed for the public, with the rest of the inventory remaining in storage and retrieved

only to replace clothing once it was sold. This made the store look less cluttered and lent it more of a boutique-style appearance. The layout emphasized the headscarf options at the center, which I was told were one of the most popular products. The company did not have religious writings or pictures of Muslim-majority countries in the store. The layout resembled that of mainstream clothing stores in Montreal, but N-ti did not use advertising imagery as do many mainstream stores. There were no images on the walls; the clothing was displayed using mannequins only.

Nurmohamed employed several terms to define the N-ti brand: Canadian, Islamic, and professional. In bringing these terms together, she suggests that N-ti combines Islamic ethics and principles with neoliberal capitalism. In recent literature on Islamic businesses, scholars have focused on whether or not Islamic principles are compromised within this type of economic system. Gökariksel and Secor (2009) argue that combining Islam and business does not necessarily create a process of abandoning the former for the latter, but rather "involves not only the adaptation and appropriation of neoliberal capitalism but also the redefinition and transformation of Islamic practice and values" (p. 11). Kiliçbay and Binark (2002), as well as Lewis (2007), situate their research on Islamic consumption within literature focusing on the development of new types of consumption and marketing that resist Western systems of commerce. This begs the question as how Islam and commerce more particularly Western neoliberal economics are reshaped and negotiated, or even resisted as in the case of N-ti. Further, who decides on what Islam and capitalism mean and how they are deployed?

Islamic fashion scholars have analyzed how Muslim businesses use branding as a means to construct their identities, and how Islam relates to that identity. Akou (2007) outlines how some store names are meant to be recognizably Islamic, as for example, "Al-Ikhlas, meaning 'sincerity,' is the name of a chapter in the Koran. Shukr Islamic Clothing explains that the word 'shukr' was chosen because it means gratitude or thanks," and "Al-Mujalbaba means simply 'the one who wears the jilbab'" (p. 412). There are other stores that play on established Western business names, adding "an Islamic twist," including "Hijabs R Us (instead of Toys R Us), The Hijab Shop (instead of The Body Shop) and ejilbab.com (not an auction site, but the name is like eBay)" (Akou, 2007, p. 412). Other businesses cite different hadiths and quotations from the Qu'ran on their websites as a means of creating a sense of authenticity for their products (Akou, 2007, p. 413). These elements come together, as Gökariksel and Secor argue, to "construct an

Islamic identity through such means as their choice of names for the company and its products and the messages they publicise through their web sites, catalogues and fashions shows" (2009, p. 12). These Islamic identities are very much constructed in relation to the Qu'ran and hadiths rather than a particular culture. Other businesses stress that they are owned by Muslims and that they give a portion of their profits to Muslim charities (Akou, 2007, p. 413). N-ti takes a different approach in which Islam is enacted in the store's business practices. Instead of borrowing recitations from the Qu'ran and hadiths, the store emphasizes the integration of Islam into Canadian culture.

An Islamic Brand for the Canadian Muslim Woman

By branding Islamic companies in the above ways, these companies aim to target a niche market of Muslim female consumers (Gökariksel & McLarney, 2010, p. 2) who will feel as though they are helping the *umma* (the Muslim community) by purchasing goods from these stores. In institutionalizing Islamic fashion, store creators have to design and construct a specific identity for their companies that satisfy the many tactics Muslim women employ. This identity is intended to provide female Muslim consumers with a sense of ease in their consumption practices, relative to what they already experience, enabling them to resort to their tactics less often. Initially, it seemed like N-ti was attempting to distance itself slightly from being seen as a strictly Islamic brand; however, once I spent time at the store, I saw that the Islamic identity of N-ti is implicitly reflected in the inner workings of the store. As Nacere mentioned in her on-line interview quoted above, the store was created to meet her needs for clothing that fit her cultural style, and that conform to her religious guidelines. The N-ti brand attempts to bring together concepts of Islam, professionalism, and Canadian identity.

The concept of professionalism was very interesting to me and seemed to be an immediate concern for N-ti, mainly because it was seen to distinguish it from other established Islamic clothing stores. According to the N-ti website,[35] the company aims to provide Islamic clothing options "for the contemporary Muslim woman who is looking for quality clothing, combining simplicity and elegance" (About N-ti, para. 1). Nurmohamed discussed how she came on board with N-ti because she and Nacere had a similar concept in mind for an Islamic clothing store, which she articulated as follows: "*In terms of creating a vision of excellence and*

[35] Since completing this dissertation, the N-ti website has relocated and the website where I received this information is no longer active.

professionalism within the Muslim market, in particular, but the modest women's market. So that's, that's how things started." Amal, an N-ti employee, identified the N-ti brand and clothing type as the following:

> *N-ti, je dirais, c'est un style de vêtements pour femmes musulmanes, spécialement mais que, même les non-musulmanes peuvent porter, parce que celles qui vont, celles qui vont sentir à l'aise dans les vêtements simples, gais, avec de belles couleurs, elles vont se sentir bien dans ce style. Donc, ce que je trouve bien dans ce que font N-ti, c'est qu'elles essaient de trouver de nouveaux modèles, elles mettent beaucoup de couleurs alors que généralement ce qu'on trouve dans les magasins traditionnels c'est surtout des couleurs sombres. N-ti met beaucoup l'action, je pense, sur la couleur, sur les nouveaux modèles, sur les nouveaux styles, et je trouve ça que c'est bien.*[36]

Also, Yousra noted that, unlike some other Islamic clothing stores, N-ti serves a new, under-served clientele:

> *Donc, nous on voulait aller chercher une autre clientèle qui veut quelque chose de pratique pour porter chaque jour, pour le travail, ou qui veut les choses simples. Dans l'islam, la femme doit essayer d'être simple, de s'habiller simple, qu'on concentre plus sur sa personnalité, que sur ce qu'elle porte.*[37]

These responses indicate a connection between Muslim women and the workforce demonstrating that even though a stereotype exists in Western culture that Muslim women are oppressed and stay at home, N-ti recognizes Muslim women as professional working women. Not only that, these Muslim women are working in Canada and need clothing that is not only practical for this specific cultural and environmental context, but that also does not betray their religious principles. N-ti targets a clientele that wants and needs to dress professionally while also following personal modesty guidelines.

This concept of professional came up when Nurmohamed discussed the mobile shop they created in order to bring N-ti to other parts of the country. When Nurmohamed first became part

[36] Translation: N-ti, I would say it's a style of dress for Muslim women, especially, but that even non-Muslims can wear, because those who go, those who will feel comfortable in clothing that is simple, happy, with beautiful colours, they will feel good in this style. So, what I find good about N-ti is that they put a lot of colours, while generally we find mostly dark colours in traditional shops. N-ti puts much attention on colour, on new models, on new styles, and I find that's good.

[37] Translation: So, we wanted to look for another clientele who wants something practical to wear every day, for work or who wants things that are simple. In Islam, women should try to be simple, to dress simple, which focuses more on personality than on what she wears.

of N-ti, she was in charge of the mobile shop, which was brought to conventions. The layout of the mobile shop strongly resembles that of the store so that mobile shop customers feel like they are in the N-ti store environment. When describing the mobile shop, Nurmohamed stated that the intention was to "*[bring] that brand awareness to another level, you know, create this awareness where there's professionalism involved, the staff is a certain way, the store represents itself in a certain way, and the merchandise represents itself that way, too.*" Again, Nurmohamed identified this professionalism as a mark of distinction separating N-ti from other Islamic stores in the market. She sees N-ti, and its brand, as signifying a heightened degree of professionalism.

The next aspect of the N-ti brand that Nurmohamed, and that Nacere also mentioned in her online interview, is that N-ti is a store for Canadian Muslims. The Canadian style of the clothing is a major element of the N-ti brand. As mentioned earlier, many Islamic clothing stores import their clothing; that is not the case with N-ti. In my interview with Nurmohamed she stated that their brand emphasizes its Canadianess because "*Dikra and I are largely Canadian in terms of our thinking and the way we dress, so I don't think another country could've produced what we produced here because they don't know what we need.*" The sense here is that Muslim women in Canada require something other than what is currently being marketed to them, and N-ti is here to supply it.

Figure 21: N-ti Business Cards

Name choice: N-ti

This Canadian element is also reflected in the choice of name for the store. The previously outlined literature notes that many Islamic companies attempt to connect the names of their stores with the Qu'ran, or look for a way to connect their stores explicitly with religious rhetoric and beliefs. N-ti takes a different approach in how they use the company name to construct an Islamic identity. The word *n-ti* translates as the feminine pronoun *you* in Arabic. On the business cards and the storefront, the word *n-ti* is translated into several different languages, emphasizing that Muslims in Canada (and around the world) speak different languages and come from different ethnic and cultural communities. As Nurmohamed put it,

> *Well, Canada's a multicultural mosaic, right, and the Muslims are, represent that. You have Muslims from Morocco, Algeria, and*

> *France, and the Arab states, and the Indian states and the Pakistani states, so they all have a different style that they're used to and like, so we have to reflect that in our product.*

Nurmohamed demonstrates here how the N-ti identity depends on a specific conception of Canadian identity as a multicultural mosaic. Khaoula stated that she likes the clothing at N-ti because it is made in Canada: "*It represents the Muslim Canadian identity and not Arabic identity, and so even the clothes are not 'Arabic style' it's really Canadian, you know, Western, so simple.*" This is a somewhat idealistic representation of Canadian identity; however, it emphasizes a notion of the country that is accepting of immigrants and different religious beliefs. By employing this particular portrayal of Canadian identity, N-ti is creating the image of an all-accepting Canada that benefits the Muslim community, rather than focusing on the ways in which Muslim women in particular are challenged in Canada.

N-ti then, is meant to serve a multicultural community that reflects the cultural makeup of Muslims in Canada, as the name indicates. In this respect, the target N-ti consumer does not come from a specific cultural tradition, but is a Muslim woman or a woman who dresses modestly and identifies as Canadian. This branding moves the idea of Islamic dress away from cultural and traditional dress and focuses on how Muslim women are adapting their own aesthetic preferences to religious ideals, while still addressing practical and cultural issues. However, unlike the other Islamic companies identified in literature, N-ti's name is not specifically religious. This identification seems to keep N-ti available as an option for non-Muslim women who are looking for modest clothing. The name *N-ti*, then, is a marker of the brand's Canadian nature, rather than a religious one. Not only that, the company's name is specific to a way of understanding Canada as a nation that celebrates its cultural mosaic. Like other stores mentioned in the literature above, N-ti also has charity collection box at their front counter and the company brings their merchandise to different Islamic events, but their Islamic branding is less explicit and more implicit in the running of the business, the merchandise they manufacture and sell, and the behaviour of the employees.

Making the N-ti Merchandise

Amal argues that this quality of appealing to a diverse population of Muslim women and the fact that the merchandise is made in Montreal, are the reason for N-ti's success. She goes on to say that

> *dans les autres magasins, c'est vrai qu'ils importent, je pense c'est plutôt de l'importation, mais c'est surtout ils restent dans le traditionnel, dans le vêtement traditionnel. Ici vous pouvez trouver les abayas, comme vous pouvez trouver des tuniques, comme vous pouvez trouver des choses un peu sport, donc, c'est ça le plus intéressent chez N-ti.*[38]

The emphasis on N-ti as a Canadian brand is also demonstrated in the ethical way that the clothing is made and the manner in which the business is run. As mentioned above, the clothing at N-ti is made in Canada, a fact that is reinforced by the salespeople to customers, on the clothing tags of each product, and also on the website.[39] The "Made in Canada" icon on the website states that "[b]esides its economic mission, N-ti is socially accountable by manufacturing its products in Canada" (N-ti). Identifying their clothing as made in Canada means that "[t]he raw material is purchased in Canada, the design is created by Canadian fashion designers, N-ti subcontractors are exclusively Canadian companies and manufacturing is done in the factory of N-ti in Montreal" (N-ti). The Canadian identity is not only reinforced through the name and style of merchandise, but also by being made in Canada in an ethical way.

Marketing and Community Outreach

As a young company, a major challenge for N-ti is their marketing and outreach to Muslim communities in Canada. Since their market is dispersed across the country and not in one central location, N-ti's challenge is finding a way to reach potential customers and making them feel included. N-ti has an official website to promote their merchandise, which includes an option to purchase the clothing online; they also ship internationally. Nurmohamed surmises that the response to the website is approximately 50% from within Canada and 50% outside of Canada. Again, unlike other clothing stores that emphasize their Islamic identity with Qu'ranic verses, N-ti highlights the practical aspects of their clothing rather than their Islamicness. For example, much of the merchandise is identified as lightweight, mobile, feminine, modest, comfortable, and suitable for many contexts and occasions. This description of the clothing serves to underline, as mentioned above, that the clothing fills a need. The styles are modest, so Islam is invoked in that respect, but the focus is not on how Muslim customers look in the

[38] Translation: in other stores, it's true they import, I think it's mostly imported, but it's certain they stay in the traditional, in traditional clothing. Here you can find abayas, like you can find tunics, like you can find sporty items, so, it's more interesting at N-ti.
[39] This is also another reference to the former website.

clothing. Rather, N-ti's website focuses on how their clothing is appropriate for the diverse lives of Muslim women in Canada.

The website also features models who wear the clothing, yet we do not see their faces. In my interview with Nurmohamed, I asked her if there was any reason, Islamic or otherwise, that the models' faces are not visible on the website. She responded

> *Yeah, because we don't want anybody who is looking at our ads to think that it can't represent them. So, when you don't put a face to it, you can put yourself easily in that role, in that place. And, it's just about the clothes then, it's not about the person who's wearing them.*

Her hope in using models without showing their faces is that consumers will more easily see themselves in the clothing, that the image will not guide the consumer in deciding what she can and cannot wear. This is a major point of deviation from how many mainstream stores advertise. Many use models as a source of inspiration for the consumer, as well as a way to make the clothes look desirable. At N-ti, the emphasis is less on the beauty of the model and more on the product itself. N-ti attempts to make the clothing accessible to as many consumers as possible.

However, when I asked Nurmohamed if there was an Islamic reason for the images to appear this way, she did feel as though it also promoted Islamic morals:

> *Sure, but I think it also goes with Islamic morals and values and standards where we don't put so much focus on our looks, per se. Like how, you know, big our bust is or how curvy we are, it's more about our intellect and how good we feel about ourselves, and you know, I think it speaks to that more so. 'Cause, it's a huge part of our religion to not be so concerned with how beautiful you are, but how you feel about yourself.*

In this respect, using models to promote the clothing is not seen as a way to objectify women, or emphasize the curves of women's bodies; rather, the way the models are staged is N-ti's attempt to focus on the inward beauty of the customer and the clothing instead of the outward beauty of the model. Nurmohamed expands on this point to demonstrate that clothing does not necessarily have to be sexualized and wanting to be dressed well does not necessarily have to translate to sexuality.

> *I don't necessarily need to wear things that make me appealing to the opposite sex, I still need to feel good about what I'm wearing, so, I need to be appealing to me, right. And so, I'm not out there trying to get the glances from other people, but at the same time,*

> *you know, I don't want to be walking around wearing a potato sack. You know, so, I'm not trying to repel people either, right. So, there's a way that we need to represent ourselves in society and as professional women, as business women, we need to somehow find that balance where we're dressing in a way that's professional and appropriate, and we still look, like, we look good and we feel good about ourselves, without objectifying our bodies.*

Again, Nurmohamed balances the contradictions that seem to arise when fashion is connected with Islam. Clothing that is appropriate for one's lifestyle, whether professional or otherwise, is a necessity; however, clothing that makes a woman feel good about herself without ignoring modesty guidelines is also important. She demonstrates here a daily negotiation that Muslim women experience in their lives. For Nurmohamed and many Muslim women who took part in this study, fashion is not equal to sexualization or immodesty.

Besides the website, the company's advertising is performed primarily through social media, a newsletter, and pamphlets. N-ti has a Facebook page and a Pinterest page. The newsletter goes out to the customer base whose contact information employees collect when a customer purchases items at the store. The newsletter is emailed twice a month and serves to bring the customer base up to date on all the events at the store. Nurmohamed uses the Facebook page in order to "try to engage [customers] with products and conversation."

N-ti also advertises its events on different Islamic websites, but most of the advertising is through social media. Nurmohamed's heavy use of social media, which allows her to engage with her consumer base, is driven by necessity. She explains,

> *As I said because N-ti's grown so quickly our liquid is very, very little. So we're struggling right now in terms of trying to find the liquid capital to fund the marketing, 'cause we've been funneling it into the stores and the product. So, once we're at a stage where these things are running efficiently, we will have that budget, it will be able to increase our budget for marketing and then will be able to involve, include those, avenues of, yeah, for sure.*

However, until then, social media serves as "*the most effective way*," as it is the most accessible. Here, she demonstrates that even through her institutionalization of Islamic fashion, she is still required to use tactics at her disposal in developing her company. Unable to use traditional forms of marketing, Nurmohamed makes use of tools available to her even before launching the store. As Manovich claims, there is fluidity between the operations of strategies and of tactics,

where strategy here can be used to refer to a business and tactics, the particular ways in which that business is being marketed.

Nurmohamed has close interactions with the community she is hoping to serve with N-ti. While their marketing efforts are still preliminary at this point, she has plans in the future for more advancement. Nurmohamed did say that she "*can't wait to put a billboard in downtown Toronto and Montreal*." When I asked Nurmohamed if she ever collects information from focus groups to see what Muslim women are looking for, she said they have not done so yet, but that they do speak with customers when they come into the store. As she put it, "*We're constantly writing down things that people are requesting and making sure that we're talking to them*." Reaching out to the female Muslim community is an essential part of how N-ti operates, (a point which I discuss at length in the section below dealing with negotiation), but Nurmohamed anticipates doing additional work in this area when N-ti has more labour power and financial resources. Some of the ideas she mentioned include more

> *community events in the store, more education-type things, where we have, you know, tutorials, stuff like that. So, we definitely like to include that, it's just that it's been a part of our marketing plan for a long time, we just haven't had the resources and the ability to do it, you know.*

Nonetheless, N-ti does serve as a site of community for its customers. For example, Nurmohamed mentioned how Eid is a busy time at the store "*because there's a need for it*" during the holidays. The store also has a family-friendly vibe to allow their target consumers, many of whom are mothers with children, to shop at the store. Nurmohamed says that at N-ti, they "*greet the families and make the children feel comfortable and happy to be here.*" While this family value is certainly reflective of Islamic Muslim ethic, she has a business objective as well. Nurmohamed hopes that this will encourage mothers to shop at N-ti, bearing in mind that "*many of those little girls are future N-ti customers, so they need to feel good when they come here.*"

Even without organized activities for the community, the mere existence of N-ti as a store that caters to Muslim women serves the Muslim community. Amal mentioned that without stores like N-ti, Muslim women would have difficulties finding suitable clothing and scarves:

> *Oui, je pense que c'est [N-ti] un service pour la communauté parce que quand la femme cherche des vêtements à mettre, elle sait qu'elle peut venir à N-ti. Et puis, qu'elle pourrait trouver en gros*

> *ce dont elle a besoin. Donc, je pense que c'est un service offert à la communauté parce que si c'est, quand il n'y avait pas ce genre de, de magasin, la femme, elle va peiner toujours à chercher dans les autres magasins qui, quelque chose qui va l'accommoder dans son vestimentaire, mais là, elle sait très bien qu'elle a un lieu où elle peut venir où elle pourrait trouver la majorité de ce qu'elle cherche, elle va aimer d'autres choses ailleurs, c'est sûr, mais elle sait qu'elle pourrait trouver moins rien que pour les foulards. Avant, quand je suis venue ici comme étudiante étrangère, je peinais pour trouver les foulards, je trouvais pas, c'était pas, j'achetais des écharpes que les gens mettaient pour, parce que je sais que, parce que j'ai pas non plus ramené, on a le droit d'amener deux valises, donc on peut pas ramener tout ma garde-robe. Donc, je peinais à trouver ça. Surtout j'étais à Gatineau-Ottawa, il n'y a pas vraiment beaucoup de choix. Dans ces deux villes, mais à Montréal, c'est vrai qu'il y a plus de communauté musulmane, il y a plus de, on trouve des magasins traditionnels, mais je pense N-ti est plus spécialisé parce que c'est des vêtements pour la vie de la femme de tous les jours.*[40]

Khaoula mentioned that working at N-ti is part of working in the community and that it links with her religion and values. This makes merely working at N-ti, a store that serves Muslim women, part of her religious convictions. Khadija said that while working at N-ti, she has the opportunity to speak and engage with members of her community. She says she speaks in Arabic, French, and English, and this type of multiculturalism is good. In this way, N-ti aims to become an establishment created for the Muslim community, specifically for Muslim women, who need to live and work in Canada.

[40] Translation: Yes, I think it is [N-ti] a service to the community because when women look for clothing to wear, she knows that she can come to N-ti. And so, she can find what she needs in bulk. So, I think it's a service offered to the community because if it's, when there wasn't this type of store women always struggled to search in other stores that, for something that will accommodate in their wardrobe but there, she well knows that she has a place where she can come where she can find the majority of what she's looking for, she'll like things from other places, it's certain, but she knows she can find less, nothing but scarves. Before, when I came here as a foreign student, I struggled to find scarves, I didn't find, it wasn't, I bought scarves that people put for, because I know that, because I didn't bring, we only have the right to bring two suitcases, so I couldn't bring my whole wardrobe. So, I struggled to find that. Especially when I was in Gatineau-Ottawa, there wasn't really much choice. In these two cities, but in Montreal, it's true there's a larger Muslim community, there's more, we find more traditional clothing stores, but I think N-ti is more specialized because it's clothing for the life of the everyday woman.

N-ti Branding through environment

One of the ways in which N-ti brands itself as an Islamic company is through the safe environment it creates for Muslims. Nurmohamed mentioned that what attracts people to the store is that it was created just for Muslim women:

> *Students are our best supporters and they love N-ti, right. A lot of the young generation love, love what we're doing. The idea, the concept of a store being for them, they love the fact that we have something for them.*

The N-ti environment, then, is created specifically to cater to Muslim women and their needs, a point that was emphasized by the employees' as well. Amal stressed that N-ti is so important because it is difficult for Muslim women who wear the headscarf to find work in Montreal. N-ti, then, becomes a place where Muslim women are not only tolerated and accepted, but welcomed and embraced and can potentially find work. It is a safe space for them. She stated:

> *C'est un environnement musulman parce que pour une femme voilée c'est pas très facile de trouver du travail. Donc, même avec des diplômes, donc c'est assez difficile.*[41]

This response demonstrates the difficulties of life that Muslim women in North America often face. It speaks to Muslim women's reality of being unable to find employment despite being educated because of their headscarves. The store, then, becomes much more than simply a place to work and consume; it becomes a place of acceptance and means of an income for Muslim women who would otherwise be unemployed. For a Muslim woman in this situation, a place like N-ti can mean a chance at survival. As Yousra noted

> *C'est un travail halal, pas d'alcool, pas, rien de mauvais, et c'est pour encourager la femme de s'habiller d'une façon sobre et respectueuse. Donc, pour moi, c'est un bon geste que je fais à chaque fois que je vends les vêtements de N-ti.*[42]

This employee's response demonstrates that by selling clothing at a store that is created for Muslim women, which is a safe and halal space, and which makes it easier for Muslim women to dress modestly, that employee is doing good, religious work when she sells merchandise at N-ti, even though the store does not explicitly reflect a religious ideology. Not only does she feel her

[41] Translation: It's a Muslim environment because, for a veiled woman, it's not very easy to find work. So, even with degrees, so it's quite difficult.

[42] Translation: It's halal work, no alcohol, nothing bad, and it encourages women to dress in a simple and respectful manner. So, for me, it's a good deed that I make whenever I sell clothes at N-ti.

values are not compromised in her employment at the clothing store, but she is actually taking part in a religious activity and allowing other Muslim women to pursue their religion as well.

N-ti employees are all permitted to pray in the store during their shifts. There is a sign that can be placed on the front door, and the door may be locked if an employee is praying. There is a prayer mat in the store that can be used by employees, and the prayer can be performed in the dressing area in the back. The women are not asked to abandon any religious ideals while working for the store; on the contrary, they are given a safe space to express their identity. This demonstrates how the neoliberal values of capitalism intersect with the Islamic values of the Muslim employees. The Islamic principles are considered valuable and important, and the Muslim women who work at the store are not asked to compromise them in order to gain employment, a luxury not afforded to them in other workplaces. Khaoula mentioned that though she performs the same tasks in her other job as a retail salesperson, the work environment at N-ti is not comparable to other clothing stores.

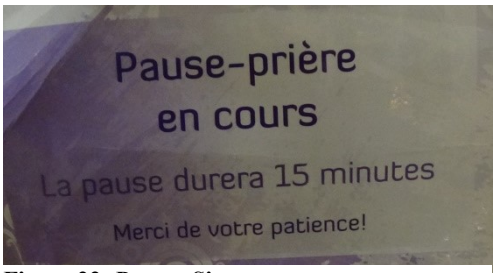

Figure 22: Prayer Sign

Also, the environment created at N-ti serves as a site of communication, not just for Muslim women, but for non-Muslims as well. Yousra mentioned that the environment created at N-ti fosters a kind of intercultural dialogue. She stated that *"[o]ui, il y a une ouverture puis c'est une place où est-ce qu'il y a de l'espace pour communiquer, pour enlever les préjugés, pour justement ouvrir la porte aux non-musulmans à connaître notre belle religion.*"[43] Here, she shows that N-ti offers a space where people can ask questions. The store then is also a space for discussion and fostering understanding with non-Muslims and a place to, potentially, lose prejudices. This dialogue demonstrates that N-ti's employees and the owner recognize that a clothing store designed for Muslim women raises questions and seems contradictory to many people, but views these questions as an opportunity to shed a different light on Islam and Muslim women. N-ti aims to be a Canadian-Islamic brand specifically meeting the needs of its target Canadian Muslim customers, and part of those needs is understanding and dislodging the image many Canadians have of Muslims. In understanding the political elements associated with

[43] Translation: Yes, there is an openness, so it's a place where there is space for communicating, to remove prejudices, for precisely opening the door to non-Muslims to know our beautiful religion.

Muslim women (that it is difficult to find work wearing the headscarf, or that non-Muslims may have some questions about Islam) the N-ti environment, a site of commerce, lends itself to being a place for discussion. While the primary goal of N-ti is to sell a type of merchandise, this opportunity to dispel stereotypes and educate the public about Islam becomes an integral part of the N-ti brand.

Merchandise

N-ti products are identified as made in Canada by tags on the clothing, as well as a notice on the website. When customers enter the store, employees remind customers that the clothing is made in Canada. If customers try to bargain on the prices, employees tell customers that the prices are non-negotiable because N-ti is a chain, so the prices need to be consistent for all three stores, and because it is more expensive to make clothes in Canada than in other countries. The reminder that the clothing is made in Canada is not only meant to communicate the N-ti brand as compatible with Canadian culture, but also the quality of the clothing, which reflects the professionalism and features that Nurmohamed identifies as being part of N-ti's mission. As Yousra mentioned, "*ce que je cherche dans les autres magasins parce que c'est des choses qui sont faites dans d'autres pays, la qualité n'est pas bonne, ça déchire après un couple de lavages, comparément avec nos vêtements ici sont vraiment solides.*"[44] This constant reference to the Canadian manufacturing of the clothing is indicative of its branding as a Canadian company, thereby creating a Canadian-Islamic identity.

This attempt at ethical and Islamic business standards does, however, cause some problems for N-ti, primarily in terms of pricing. The prices of the clothing at N-ti are comparable to mainstream chain clothing stores like Jacob or Zara, which are at the higher end of the clothing market for non-high end brands. While many Muslim consumers are ready and willing to pay these prices for clothes from Jacob and Zara, it is a relatively new concept for an Islamic clothing store. Many customers who entered the store found that the prices were high. As Nurmohamed says,

> *People are not used to shopping in an Islamic store and paying Zara prices, because they're used to people bringing product from China or from Kuwait or from Lebanon and getting it for two dollars a piece*

[44] Translation: What I look for in other stores, because they are things that are made in other countries, the quality is not good, it rips after a few washes, compared to our clothing, here they are very strong.

as opposed to manufacturing within Canada and then having that price added to that.

The price of ethically running a business is a hard sell when other stores in the market are able to buy and sell their merchandise cheaply. However, the ethical aspect of the brand is part of incorporating Islamic values into the consumer sphere. Khadija's opinion about business and Islam is that religious principles should come into decision-making about consumerism:

> *Il y a des conditions économiques, comme j'ai dit l'islam rentre dans tout, même économiquement, même dans la vente, dans, même fixer un certain, une certaine marge de bénéfice pour que tu vends pas la chose plus chère que ça devrait se faire pour ne pas, c'est à dire, comment dire, pour ne pas, que le client se fait avoir. Donc, il faut, il veut que les droits du client, et les droits de ceux qui vendent, donc, dans tout ça, ça rentre, en général, oui.*[45]

This general statement about the mixing of Islam and business reflects in how N-ti does business and how, even though it is uncommon for Islamic businesses to be expensive, N-ti does not want to make their clothing in unethical ways that would be contrary to Islamic principles. N-ti's Islamic ideology, then, is found in many aspects of the store, even if that ideology makes it difficult to be a competitor on the market. This one aspect simultaneously reflects Canadian-manufactured clothing, the professionalism of the brand (i.e. in the quality of the clothing, the way the business is run, and the style of the clothing), the Canadian nature of the brand (made in Canada, Canadian style), and the Islamic nature of the brand (clothing is made ethically and fairly; and is not exploitative). The N-ti brand, then, incorporates many complementary elements, one of which is religious, and all of which work in concert to determine how the business is run. Instead of religion being in contradiction or in competition with, or even detrimental to these values, it blends in with the other elements.

Figure 23: N-ti Merchandise

[45] Translation: There are economic conditions, like I said, Islam comes into everything, even economically, even in the sale, in, even setting a certain profit margin so you do not sell things more expensive than that it should not, that is to say, how to say, so the client isn't had. So, it wants that the rights of the clients, and the right of the seller, so, in all this, it fits, in general, yes.

The clothing is described as simple, practical, loose, and professional. The options include tunics, shirts, wide-legged pants, skirts, and abayas**.** N-ti used to offer hemming and adjustments if the clothes did not fit, but they stopped offering this service before I began my fieldwork at the store. The clothes follow different fashion trends that are indicative of their influences. For example, Fatma Nurmohamed mentioned that Turkish trends, trends from the Gulf countries, and Canadian trends influence the designs, but the clothes all fit within N-ti's overall brand and aesthetic. N-ti clothing is cut to be loose and de-emphasize curves, while curves tend to be highlighted in mainstream stores. For example, clothing available in many mainstream stores uses darts to emphasize a bust line; however, at N-ti the clothing de-emphasizes the bust area by using loose cuts. N-ti's skirts employ A-line cuts, rather than designs that fit tightly to underline curves. In my interview with Khadija, she discussed how these designs are made specifically for Muslim women, stating that:

Figure 24: N-ti Merchandise

Figure 25: N-ti Skirts

> *parce que les modèles qu'ils offrent c'est les modèles qu'on peut pas trouver ailleurs, et c'est fait pour la femme musulmane. Avec, il y a beaucoup de foulards, beaucoup de choses longues, larges, des abayas, et beaucoup de choses qui, pour aider la femme, donc, quand la femme musulmane va vouloir acheter les vêtements, première chose à laquelle elle va penser c'est de venir ici.*[46]

The type of merchandise is specific to certain guidelines, and this is part of what attracts customers. The long, wide clothing makes it easier for consumers to get an appropriate and proportionate outfit for their size.

All of the clothing is designed specifically for N-ti.

[46] Translation: because the models they offer are the models that we cannot find elsewhere, and it is made for the Muslim woman. With, there are many scarves, many long things, wide, abayas, and many things that, to help women, so, when the Muslim woman wants to buy clothing, the first thing she will think of will be to come here.

Any designer may bring their design ideas to the company, not only Muslim designers. As Nurmohamed explains: the designers "*are up with the fashion trends and the colours and what we need and then we have the fashion designers adjust and modify different patterns and designs according to our needs.*" This dynamic demonstrates how N-ti is navigating the fashion and design sphere in running their business. The designers are not necessarily Muslim women themselves, but through working with the people at N-ti, the needs of Muslim women are made clear and are incorporated into the N-ti clothing designs.

The designs themselves are meant to reflect the multicultural nature of Canadian consumers, who Nurmohamed identifies as N-ti's target customers. As she states, the collection incorporates styles that

> *are Western-based, or inspired by Western trends. You'll see some are inspired by the Saharan trends, you'll see a lot of Moroccan influence in here, Dikra's [the store creator] Moroccan, so you'll see a lot of Moroccan influence in here, the longer tops with the pants or the three-quarter length with the pants, you know that kind of thing, you'll see a lot of that. There's Turkish inspired tops and, you know, so we've chosen from different regions to appeal to a wide range of people.*

The designs represent a cross-section of the global Muslim community, but she notes that they are "inspired by" these trends and not directly copying them, thus demonstrating that N-ti fills a distinct, specific need for Muslim women. The influence of certain styles is present, but with an understanding that they are appropriate for the Muslim community in Canada. The ethical ways in which the clothes are made, as well as the modest designs of the clothing, communicates the N-ti philosophy. So a Turkish inspired tunic will be adapted to certain aesthetic, practical, and cultural needs specific to Muslim women living in Canada. This is the way the N-ti brand incorporates elements from a general and wide Muslim community, while not replicating cultural and traditional styles imported from other countries.

N-ti offers many headscarf style options. The different styles are suitable for a variety of lifestyles. Many women come in looking for something lightweight or heavier depending on the weather, something suitable for sports, or even to coordinate with work uniforms, where a specific colour is needed. There are also options of rectangular or square-shaped headscarves, and many customers come in with one of those styles in mind. Headscarves are the biggest

Figure 26: N-ti Headscarf

sellers for N-ti and are prominently placed in the center of the store. Nurmohamed states that the scarves serve as a focal point, because they have different styles and colours, and

> *most of the women that come here wear scarves on their heads, and as something that you wear all the time you need, you need them. So that's probably something that sells quite a bit because you may not want another skirt, but you can always take home a new scarf.*

Nurmohamed recognizes N-ti as a necessity for Muslim women, and if a Muslim woman wears a headscarf every day, she will undoubtedly require a large number of them. N-ti is therefore not just about style and looking professional, but more importantly, about providing necessities for Muslim women who may have difficulty finding them somewhere else.

Figure 27: N-ti Headscarf

Additionally, the store has an assortment of bags, headscarf pins, and hair clips to add volume under headscarves that they sell alongside clothing and scarves. They also sell breathable nail polish, but it is only available online. Fatma Nurmohamed told me that she began in the business by designing and creating headscarf pins. The pins are used to secure headscarves that are wrapped in different styles. Nurmohamed mentioned that people have come in before and purchased the headscarf pins to be used as earrings. Furthermore, customers are using what they find at the store to create their own tactics of dress. If a customer does not wear headscarf pins, she can wear the pins as earrings. In doing so, Muslim women are still negotiating as consumers as they enter the establishment, even if it is an Islamic establishment designed for their needs.

Figure 28: N-ti Headscarf Pins

Another product is hair clips that can be placed under a headscarf to give the look of volume and shape. The function of the clip is to make it appear as though there is a large bun of hair underneath the headscarf, giving a nice shape to what could be a bumpy hairstyle. While I did not see anyone purchase one of these clips at N-ti, I did see people look at them and ask what they were; however, there really was little interest in this style.

Figure 29: N-ti Hair Clip

Breathable nail polish, which was recently released, has been popular with the female Muslim community around the world. It was created as an environmentally friendly alternative to regular nail polish, but found a niche market in the female Muslim community (Associated Press, 2013). Breathable nail polish allows Muslim women to wear nail polish while praying. Many Muslim women do not wear nail polish while they are praying because when they make wudu,[47] nail polish prevents water from getting to the nail. However, this new nail polish allows water to touch the nail. Muslim women are using a product created for environmental purposes for a completely different purpose to fulfill their religious and aesthetic ideals. The ways the headscarf pins and the breathable nail polish are being reappropriated here demonstrates the ways that the store employs tactics and reinvents old products in the process, illustrating the process that tactics are part of the institutionalization of Islamic fashion at N-ti. Breathable nail polish was not invented for Muslim women, hair pins are not meant to be used as earrings, but instead of rejecting these tactics, Nurmohamed makes use of them in the store. N-ti, then, is being built on the previous knowledge base of Muslim women consumers and this knowledge is considered valuable, cost efficient, and already familiar to the N-ti consumer base.

Nurmohamed states that there are several essential items from their collection that they consistently have in stock. The Western-styled tunics and pants are often cited as being best-sellers and popular with customers. These include plain skirts, black clothing items, headscarves, and accessories for the headscarf. As Nurmohamed added, "*Those are usually the things that sell the most, 'cause it's what everybody needs. Everybody needs a black skirt.*" Here, she places the emphasis on what members of the community *need*. A black skirt is a

[47] Many Muslims will wash various parts of their body three times before praying, and it is necessary for the water to touch the skin in this process.

practical option that can be worn in many different contexts. This is a divergence from how fashion and consumption is usually classified as superficial and extraneous. Consumption is often perceived as unnecessary, as something done for fun, as excess, but N-ti's brand is designed to provide Muslim women with clothing that is necessary and required in order to simply *have* clothing, though not necessarily a surplus of clothing. For example, Khaoula mentioned how the clothes at N-ti can be worn "*to work or to school*" and that at N-ti, "*You can come here and actually choose an outfit, a whole outfit together. So it's really simple, elegant*," but on top of that "*practical*." N-ti recognizes and fills a need to make shopping for clothing easier for the Muslim women that comprise their target demographic.

In my interview with Nurmohamed, she stated that the store's niche is Muslim women who identify as being part of Canadian culture and who are not necessarily interested in wearing imports from the Middle East. As Nurmohamed said, "*When you import things from other countries it's got the style of that country, right?"* Nurmohamed wants N-ti to primarily reflect a Canadian style. This is especially true for converts. As Nurmohamed states, the appeal of N-ti is that it not only serves the Muslims who were raised in Islam, but also new Muslims. As she states, N-ti is there to help these Muslim converts as well.

> *I want to fill that need, I want to be there to help them and maybe there's that woman who's struggling to, she's just become Muslim and her family is Baptist or they're Christian or they're, you know, Anglo-Saxon or whatever, and you know, wearing a black abaya is not gonna help her make her family feel comfortable, you know. We're here for those women who need something besides the black abaya.*

Nurmohamed's special attention to women who have converted to Islam demonstrates how being a Muslim woman in Canada requires a learning process.

Navigating & Performing the N-ti Brand

As I move onto the negotiations and navigations of the store, I use Robert Prus's (1998) research, which identifies that in the marketplace, consumers "assume a variety of target and tactician roles" (p. 39). In his analysis, Prus looks at how

> the marketplace offers a most intriguing arena for examining human interchanges. Reflecting contrasts of excitement and boredom, challenge and frustration, trust and deception, planning and ambiguity, solitary ventures and group endeavors, the

> marketplace denotes ongoing sets of enterprise, interchange, and adjustments. (p. 22)

This is similar to Jennifer Scanlon (2000), whose work I mentioned earlier, who argues that consumption needs to be understood "truly as a process" by consumers who are making their own decisions (p. 6). This interaction, this negotiation of the space is part of the process of branding and can help redefine that brand. The process of consumption at N-ti is driven by the questions of what defines Muslim identity? What is Islamic dress? What is Canadian-Muslim culture?

What is Islamic Dress at N-ti?

The above section focuses on N-ti operations, its philosophy, merchandise, and structure. The main point to recognize about N-ti is that, as a business, it is attempting to fulfill the needs of its niche market of Muslim women. N-ti is based on providing something that Muslim women need in order to live in Canada, and the bottom line is not only earning a profit, but also providing ethically made clothes for Muslim women. During my time at N-ti, I found it interesting that the N-ti brand reverberates from the employees and their interactions with the customers to customers' reactions to N-ti. There is also a constant negotiation and adaptation that continues to take place at N-ti between all these players. The brand, the clothes, and the interactions are constantly adjusting to the variables with which they come into contact. As Nurmohamed mentions, the Canadian Muslim population is diverse. Due to many factors, including immigration, the population is ever-changing and varied, so the store's operations need to continue to reflect those changes.

When it comes to that age-old question of what constitutes Islamic dress, Nurmohamed and the employees all had differing responses. However, they all stated that there are general guidelines to follow and that how Muslim women apply them is a matter of personal choice. Nurmohamed contends:

> *Islamic dress is a completely personal thing. Of course, there are guidelines as Muslims we should follow, just as any religion has certain guidelines that people should be following, but I think that people choose their level of practice or their level of appreciation or understanding or whatever of their religion, and I think it's a very personal thing.*

Then the question becomes, if all these women have different ideas about what constitutes Islamic dress, and dress is a personal reflection of one's spirituality and religious practice, how is this reflective within a store with set merchandise?

Employees

The intention of the store environment is to serve as a safe place for Muslim women to shop and work. However, to move the concept of branding away from simply the style of the store and the products sold, I am drawn to Lynn Pettinger's (2004) approach to branding, which she discusses in "Brand Culture and Branded Workers: Service Work and Aesthetic Labour in Fashion Retail." In this article, she focuses on the work employees at clothing stores conduct in order to encourage the purchase of merchandise (p. 165). Pettinger concentrates on the way employees at different stores "embody the marketing and branding strategies through the clothing they wear at work, and through their own consumption behavior. In embodying the brand, workers are selling in the way distinct from any form of customer service they may also provide" (p. 177). In relation to my analysis of N-ti, I am interested here in how the brand is being embodied by the N-ti employees and how the brand is further communicated through the services the employees provide and how they provide them. What kinds of ways do the N-ti employees perform their Muslim identity through their role as salespeople and how does that enhance the branding of the store?

When I first started my fieldwork at the store, there were five employees who worked at the Montreal location. Nurmohamed works primarily at the Toronto location, but she is the owner and CEO of N-ti and is in charge of hiring practices and the overall business. The employees were all from different backgrounds: an Algerian, a Québécoise, two Moroccans, and a Tunisian. They were all women and most of them had ethnic backgrounds from the North African region. The Quebec Muslim community includes a large proportion of immigrants from North Africa, most particularly those regions that were colonized by France.

The employees at N-ti were, at the time of the interviews, 20, 22, 34, 37, and 39 years old and had different educational backgrounds. All of the employees were expected to speak French and English in order connect with the customers and to communicate with Fatma who does not speak French. Two employees were pursuing undergraduate studies, one was completing master's studies, one had a college degree, and another employee had completed her master's

degree. All of the employees had other career interests and responsibilities: They were mothers, women looking for more permanent full-time employment or employment in their field, and undergraduate students. They found their jobs at N-ti through various means: a friend, a posting online, the website, the Facebook page, and by just passing the store while driving in the neighbourhood.

As mentioned in the section about the N-ti work environment, many of the women saw their job at N-ti as an excellent option since it was so Muslim-friendly. Yousra also mentioned that N-ti creates jobs for Muslim women because it is difficult for Muslim women to find work. N-ti creates sales jobs for Muslim women in the store and also hires "*les femmes voilées pour coudre les vêtements, pour faire la gestion commerce, pour travailler, tout ça*"[48] and that this enables women to be "*indépendantes, qu'elles sont intelligentes, et qu'elles sont autonomes, donc, c'est ça dans cette optique-là, aussi.* "[49] The creation of jobs for Muslim women is important, and the Muslim women employed at N-ti have an important job serving the female Muslim community.

All five employees answered that they were interested in fashion in one way or another. Khaoula said that she was interested in fashion because she can "*express [her] taste, express, 'cause [she] feel[s] like, the way you dress is, kind of describes your personality*" and she continues, *"I think fashion is different for every person and it's the way you see yourself and, and you portray it to other people, in a way*." For other employees, fashion means following the trends, finding ways to adapt clothing to their needs, enjoying dressing well and elegantly, and demonstrating that a Muslim woman is still a woman. As Arij states "*Il faut prendre soin de toi, avant d'être une voilée tu es une femme, puis une femme ça doit prendre soin de soi. J'aime les couleurs, j'aime la mode en tout court, être toujours à jour avec ça.*"[50] There is an interest in not only religion and religious practice, but also in fashion and taking pride in their appearance that informs how these Muslim women function as salespeople at N-ti.

All five employees wore a headscarf, and they all identified as being practicing Muslims. As mentioned above, Nurmohamed defines Islamic dress as informed by decisions that are quite personal. This was reflected in the employees at the store and how they dressed. The employees

[48] Translation: veiled women to sew clothing, to manage the store to work, all that.
[49] Translation: independent, they are intelligent, and they are autonomous, so, it is in that perspective, too.
[50] Translation: You have to take care of yourself, before being a veiled woman you're a woman, and a woman has to take care of herself. I love colours, I like fashion, in short, to always be up to date with it.

all made different choices within the broad guidelines Nurmohamed mentioned previously (e.g. loose, long, opaque clothing). All the employees agreed that the modesty guidelines include wearing loose and long clothing, and dressing and behaving modestly, but the employees all applied these guidelines in a manner specific to each of them. While I was working at N-ti, I noticed that one employee wore all N-ti clothing and wore abayas most of the time. Another employee wore long skirts and dresses. She no longer wears pants because she finds it difficult to find wide-legged pants in the mainstream clothing market, which is trending more towards skinny jeans. Other employees wore long tops or short dresses with their pants. There are different ways that the women embody the guidelines Nurmohamed identifies as constitutive of Islamic dress.

Several employees mentioned that the Qu'ran, specifically the chapter Surah al-Nour, asks that Muslim women dress modestly, and for these women that also includes wearing the headscarf. However, throughout the interviews, there was also a discussion of their interpretations of what modesty means. Modesty can also refer to how someone behaves, and behaviour can vary depending on location in the world and the religious interpretations and cultural expectations inherent to these specific contexts.

The broad guidelines about how to dress explains why many Muslim women interpret these guidelines differently. However, Arij mentioned that though she wears the headscarf, she is not judging others, but rather, her choice is based on a personal and private decision. The general guidelines that the employees at the store strongly agreed on, and which they either stated in their interviews or reflected in their personal dress, are summarized in following quote by Yousra:

> *Il y a trois critères : faut que ça soit large, faut que ça soit opaque, ça veut dire pas transparent, il faut que ça soit assez long aussi, donc il y a trois critères pour le hijab. Le hijab c'est pas juste un foulard sur la tête, c'est, une, toute une façon de s'habiller, donc c'est pas vrai qu'un foulard sur la tête avec des jeans serrés puis un t-shirt c'est le hijab, ça c'est pas le hijab.*[51]

[51] Translation: There are three criteria: it must be broad, it has to be opaque, that means not transparent, it has to be long enough, too, so there are three criteria for hijab. The hijab is not just a headscarf, it's a, a way of dressing, so it is not true that a headscarf with tight jeans and a t-shirt is hijab, that is not hijab.

How a woman decides to dress is her personal decision, but Nurmohamed and her employees all agreed that general modesty guidelines in the Qu'ran call for loose and long clothing. This leaves room for negotiation on the part of the employees and customers.

Since these five women that I interviewed during my fieldwork at the store all had similar ideas about Islamic dress, I wondered if this was something that Nurmohamed specifically searched for when recruiting salespeople. I was particularly interested in how the headscarf functioned in relation to the dress the employees wear at N-ti. When I asked Nurmohamed if she specifically sought out Muslim women who wore the headscarf to work at the store, she responded:

> *I don't necessarily go out of my way to hire Muslim women, but when you go shopping in a store, you want that salesperson to represent you. You need for her to understand your needs. Just like when I go shopping at Guess or when I go shopping at, wherever, any brand name store you can think of, if the salesperson approaches me and she's wearing a mini skirt and a tank top, I'm not sure if she can serve me. I'm not sure if she knows what I need. Of course, occasionally you'll find a salesperson who'll surprise you and realizes that you're looking for something modest, and realizes that, you know, the tight or the skinny jeans, the crop top isn't what you're looking for, once and awhile you'll find that, but right away, I'm not going to be drawn to a salesperson who doesn't reflect me. So I don't necessarily go out of my way looking for that, but yeah, I mean, for you to be able to understand that customer, you have to be living that life, you know. Like the hijab is a big part of it. I don't necessarily choose staff because they wear hijab, but if somebody's coming in and they want to learn how to wrap it, if you don't wear hijab, it's very difficult to explain or to show how it's done, and it's, and you don't understand the struggles that a Muslim woman who covers will go through in a day. Like you can say you understand 'cause you see them and you see the struggle, and you've read about it, whatever, but unless you actually live that life, where you have people dealing with you in a certain way, you never understand what it's like, you know, when it's too hot outside, or when it's too cold, or if a certain fabric's not the right fabric or it's not wrapped right. You know that kind of thing, you know, those are the things that you think about. In terms of sales, like a salesperson has to understand the customer that she's serving.*

The description here is telling for many reasons in terms of what N-ti is attempting to accomplish. For one, the Muslim women employees at N-ti who represent an Islamic identity

through their dress and their headscarves are meant to serve as individuals who understand and connect with the consumers who enter the store. Nurmohamed does not see people who represent her when she walks into non-Islamic stores, and so the employees at N-ti are meant to represent and reflect a very specific identity for their target consumer. Their headscarf is a reflection of their understanding of the difficulties and challenges of being a Muslim woman in North America. As Nurmohamed mentioned, in a mainstream store where the branding is much different than at N-ti, a Muslim woman's needs are unfamiliar and, at times, even strange since dressing modestly tends to differ greatly from mainstream fashion conventions.

Her comments also reflect how dressing modestly in North America is a skill that is learned, not one that is inherent to Muslim women. Learning how to wrap the headscarf and understanding which fabrics to choose is part of the Muslim Canadian experience, so N-ti serves as a site where those kinds of discussions and sharing can occur. Furthermore, her comments regarding the struggle of being a Muslim woman and understanding what that life is like because you live it every day demonstrate that N-ti is about more than clothing. As Nurmohamed says, a person can read about the experience of a Muslim woman, but unless she lives it, it is impossible to understand and empathize with clients. The brand is meant to reflect, not only the dress, but also the struggle of being a Muslim woman in Canada. While Nurmohamed recognizes in her response that not all Muslim women wear the headscarf and that she does not actively seek out Muslim women who wear the headscarf for the job, she does recognize that a store needs to understand its clients, and wearing the headscarf is a big part of that understanding because it also serves as a signifier communicated to the consumer that the employee understands.

Muslim Women as Representatives

The employees, then, are there to provide help with the merchandise, but they also act as representatives of their religion, which is in line with what N-ti defines as being a Canadian Muslim. All of the employees I interviewed stated that they felt Muslim women were poorly represented in media. While none of these women changes her appearance or rejects her religion in order to assimilate into Quebec society, Arij, as previously mentioned, recognized that she is a walking representation of a Muslim woman. She recognizes that, even without necessarily wanting to be or seeking it out, she is a walking symbol of Islam. Muslim women perceive, to a

certain degree, that they are being watched. However, the response Khaoula shared demonstrates the ethos of the N-ti mission.

> *I feel I'm responsible for is educating people, so, so every time there's, you know, I have a chance, I discuss about hijab and I tell them what it is for, so, if they get more educated about any religion, any different, you know, the other religions, they will accept it more because they will understand.*

The employees within that environment are prepared to deal with the stereotypes and political issues Muslim women face on a daily basis and provide productive dialogue in their role as salespeople.

Relationship with Clients

There are many reasons that customers enter N-ti. During my interviews, the N-ti employees mentioned seeing a wide demographic of consumers who come to the store. Yousra mentioned that usually customers are women from the age of 25 and older and Arij mentioned women between the ages of 18-45. Amal said there is no specific age and she sees everyone coming through the doors at N-ti. On any given day at N-ti, I saw teenagers to middle-aged women come into the store. Khadija felt that her role with customers was to help them while they shop and her connection to them ends after they leave, while other employees felt there was a deeper role and connection they needed to make with customers who come into the store. According to an interview with Yousra, sometimes customers come to shop at N-ti because they are visiting an Arab country and need appropriate clothing. Arij mentioned how N-ti serves as an easy store to shop in if you are a consumer who does not want to shop around at different stores. N-ti makes it easy for Muslim women to find the clothing they need. The relationship between the consumers and the employees demonstrates how the space of the store serves as a means for Muslim women to help each other navigate the North American landscape.

Pettinger (2004) argues that the customer service at a store is part of the overall "sales strategy" (p. 172) of the business. She states that

> [s]elling in the retail clothing sector involves filling in with some form of customer service where self-service is not possible. The relationship between services provided by workers and self-service done by customers is critical, a reflection of the retail 'service culture', a term I use to refer to the nature and extent of customer service provision. (p. 173)

Customer service is extremely important at N-ti; there is a strong emphasis placed on being available for customers when they enter the store. As Arij noted in comparing working at N-ti to her job as a salesperson at the Eaton Centre, the customer base at N-ti is

> *une clientèle plus sélective. T'as juste des musulmanes ou des hommes qui viennent avec leurs femmes, ou les hommes qui viennent tout seuls, celui qui veut acheter pour sa mère, sa tante, pour sa sœur, pour whatever, mais c'est une clientèle plus sélective. T'as aussi une, c'est aussi plus, les jeunes viennent rarement pour acheter les jupes.*[52]

She illustrates that the needs are very specific for this customer base and that what they need will be different than at places like the Eaton Centre. The employees, then, need to be prepared to deal with, and actively help, this selective and specific client base.

If an employee is working with a customer and someone else walks in, she will try to get to the new customer, too. If there is no one else in the store when a customer enters, the employee will immediately make herself available to the customer. The one-on-one customer service is a major part of the N-ti operation. During the time I was at the store, there were not many customers coming in. The customers' ages ranged from teenagers to middle-aged with a variety of concerns, such as clothing being too hot or cold, style, and practical issues they deal with in their daily lives.

Whenever someone enters the store or the phone rings, the employees greet the consumer by saying "salam alaikum, bonjour." Salam alaikum is the common greeting Muslims use with each other, which translates to "peace be upon you." The connection is immediately made that, even though there are no Qu'ranic verses in the store or on the website, and even though there are no images on the wall to suggest that N-ti is an Islamic store, the employees' greeting to clients serves to communicate that it is an Islamic store.

The employees are also meant to serve as experts on how to dress and how to make customers' outfits work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, being a Muslim woman in Canada takes skill and therefore, the N-ti employees are more than simply salespeople or stylists, they are actually experts on being Muslim women in Canada. Their role is to help other Muslim

[52] Translation: a more selective clientele. You just have Muslim women or men who come with their wives, or men who come alone, they want to buy for their mother, their aunt, for their sister, for whatever, but it's a more selective clientele. You also have, it's also more, young people come rarely to buy skirts.

women find clothing that works for them. Arij describes giving help and recommendations as part of her role as a salesperson at N-ti. She stated that

> *they're looking, some of them, ceux qui sont plus nouveaux, they're looking for help. They're looking how [do] I wear it, can you please show me, is that. Mais ceux qui sont plus anciennes, elles trouvent pas l'envie de demander plus d'aide, elles cherchent plus, elles savent c'est quoi leur choix qu'elles ont dans leur tête déjà.*

This employee demonstrates a bit of a generational discrepancy between older consumers who may already have their mind made up on how they wrap their headscarves or wear their clothing, and the younger individuals who are interested in new ideas and new trends and who may require and request more help from the employees. Amal mentioned how when she started wearing the headscarf she also needed help in learning how; she also said that that is how women learn:

> *Parce que c'est comme ça qu'on va, c'est comme ça qu'on va grandir, c'est comme ça qu'on va, c'est en partageant les choses qu'on va, qu'on va avoir plus de choses, de nouvelles choses, de façons de faire, peut-être que la nôtre n'est pas bonne et on, c'est dans le partage que ça, que les choses se font.*[53]

The employees were also experts at helping Muslim women combine the clothing they have purchased at other clothing stores with what they find at N-ti. As Khaoula describes:

> *I've been proposed to work in other places and I didn't, I said no, I'm good where I am, 'cause even the clients are very, very nice, and they want, many of them they, not everybody has the sense of fashion and so they, I don't know what to wear, I don't know how to match this with this, and so they bring for example a jacket they found at or a dress they found in, in a store a, a regular store and they come here, oh find me a hijab with it and what should I, how should I cover this, so I like using my creativity to help them.*

Knowing how to dress without needing to wear imports from the Middle East is an issue for many women who convert to Islam. This is partly due to the fact that often the only examples they have available to them on how to make modesty guidelines work is cultural attire. Sometimes wearing imported dress serves as an initial way to dress until a woman's lifestyle and fashion interests make this dress inappropriate. Amal stated that Muslim women who convert need help not just in modifying their clothes, but also in deciding how to wear the headscarf.

[53] Translation: Because that's how we go, that is how we grow, that's how we're going, it's, through sharing things we will, that we will have more things, new things, ways to do, maybe ours is no good and we, it is in sharing that, that things are done.

> *Parce que, même les femmes quand elles viennent ici des fois tu, on tombe sur des nouveaux convertis, nouvelles converties, ou on tombe sur des femmes qui savaient pas comment mettre leur voile. Alors, ça nous fait plaisir de les aider, ça nous fait plaisir de leur montrer d'autres façons de faire, parce que, c'est comme ça, je suis comme ça, donc, on est là pour vendre les produits, c'est sûr, on est là pour que cette affaire marche, donc, on fait de notre maximum, et puis si on va aider quelqu'un c'est, ça nous fait plaisir.*[54]

As she states, helping these new converts with their clothing and their headscarf makes the employees feel happy, demonstrating that working at N-ti is about more than just a job, but also a way to connect and assist new members of the community as well.

These cases demonstrate that the Canadian-Islamic brand is being enacted through the interactions between the employees and the customers. The Muslim women employees are expected to understand what it is like to live in Canada as a Muslim woman, understand the guidelines of how to dress appropriately as a Muslim woman, and provide support that customers may not receive from the larger population. Many recently converted Muslim women have also been coming to the store and asking for help from people who understand their needs. The store is also a place for intercultural dialogue. As previously mentioned, there is a chance to discuss and share ideas with non-Muslims and new converts.

These comments demonstrate that N-ti provides a safe space for Muslim women to communicate, interact, and share ideas. In this respect, when applying Lynn Pettinger's analysis of branding, the service culture at N-ti goes beyond picking up sizes, helping with fashion advice, folding clothes, or helping in the changing room. The service culture at N-ti really is, in many ways, an education for Muslim women on how to dress as a Muslim in Canada, and employees to provide a sympathetic ear to the experiences that Muslim women in Canada encounter on a daily basis. Pettinger focuses on the use personal service in stores as contingent on their ranking (e.g. whether the stores fall at higher end or lower ends in the market). At N-ti, service is created within a culture of a minority group that goes beyond help with the clothes; it involves creating a safe environment and offering assistance to enable customers to integrate into

[54] Because, even women, when they come here sometimes you, we come across new converts [male], new converts [female], or we come across women who do not know how to put on their veils. So, we are pleased to show them other ways to do, because, it is like that, I am like that, so, we are there to sell products, it is certain, we are there so the store works, so, we do our best, and then if we can help someone, it makes us happy.

Canadian culture, providing information to converts, and educating people who are unfamiliar with Islam.

Negotiations of Islam, Fashion, and Identity

Since Muslim women are diverse as a population, the question then becomes how does Nurmohamed know what all Muslim women need? The store can really only serve the portion of the population that agrees with Nurmohamed about what the religious guidelines are in Islam for women's dress. Is N-ti, then, an exclusive brand that claims to know what Muslim women need, as long as those needs are fully in line with N-ti's own principles?

Nurmohamed mentioned that there are certain items that Muslim women request, which the store does not currently sell. For example, she mentions face veils and tank tops as products that are not available at N-ti. Initially, it seemed as though these items were absent because they are outside of what Nurmohamed believes to be required dress for Muslim women. However, her response to my questions reveals a level of re-negotiation and re-interpretation that she herself experiences as she witnesses the process of consumption:

> *There are women who want face veils, and one day we'll provide face veils, you know. Once we have enough people that need it, we will for sure start providing it, you know, like, um, I'm not about to sell things that are gonna affect how, question my Islam, and my Islamic character, so I'm not going to be selling tank tops, but, I mean, at the same time, maybe I will, if Muslim women start requesting tank tops then it's not up to me to decide whether, where they're going to wear it or how they're going to wear it, right?*

Nurmohamed's response here underscores that she has her own definition of what Islamic dress is and what the store should be selling should reflect that. She also does not want to sell any clothing that would be out of line with her own values. However, she changes the direction of her response to recognize that there are Muslim women who may have differing ideas of what constitutes Muslim dress, and that she is not about to judge those choices. Furthermore, she identifies, as discussed in the previous chapter that Muslim women create many tactics in their daily lives to adapt clothing to their modesty standards, and these could still be in line with her perspective of Islamic dress. A Muslim woman could be wearing the tank top under a shirt, at home, or as pyjamas. Throughout this response, the process of consumption evolves, and Nurmohamed recognizes that a brand that aims to sell clothing to Muslim women should provide

the clothing that customers want instead of determining beforehand what constitutes Islamic dress. Her definition of the N-ti brand, then, is altered and re-formed through her interactions with consumers. Deciding what designs and merchandise to carry in the store really reflects the negotiation that takes place between Nurmohamed's own personal views and the desires of her customers. However, she also recognizes that her definition of a Canadian-Islamic identity is not the only one that matters. In this way, N-ti is not about streamlining one way of being a Muslim woman, or even about making Islamic dress acceptable in the West, but about providing for the Muslim community's wants and needs. This is in line with neoliberal principles underpinning the market place. Consumer demands carry weight.

Muslim customers come into the store with their own expectations of what an Islamic brand or store will look like. These expectations are informed by cultural backgrounds, religious identification, and personal dress practices. How customers interact within a consumer environment is based on their own cultural interpretations. For example, there is a sign in the store that states that bargaining is not permitted and that prices cannot be renegotiated. As one of the employees told me, there are times when Arab customers will expect to be able to bargain in the store. This is not something they would engage in at a non-Islamic clothing store; however, since N-ti claims to be an Islamic clothing store, consumers may entertain particular cultural expectations of what that means.

As N-ti is an Islamic clothing store, when customers come in, they have their own expectations of what they will find, especially since Islamic dress is in many ways defined by one's own experiences and cultural traditions. Their expectations are also defined by their own stereotypes of what an Islamic store should carry. For example, Nurmohamed mentioned that N-ti is busy around Eid,[55] since consumers are buying dresses for prayer and for other celebrations. Many times, during celebrations like Eid, many people will wear traditional and cultural dress. Arij mentioned, "*Some people are looking for things that [are] cultural, especially on Eid or something like that, they want, like, something to go to pray*." Cultural or traditional clothing items are not available at N-ti. While I was at the store, there were consumers who came in expecting to purchase specific traditional or cultural clothing for special occasions. It seemed as though they came to N-ti expecting to find these items, but found N-ti clothing instead.

[55] Eid Al-Adha and Eid Al-Fitr are the two major religious holidays in Islam.

Additionally, many customers who enter the store question the idea of what is Islamic, regardless of culture. Arij outlined the concerns that many Muslim women have when they enter the store.

> *Il y a du monde qui trouve pas ça très islamique. Il y a du monde, it's not that long, it's too thin, we can see through it. C'est moulant, les pantalons. I don't know, the skirts are too tight, les trucs de même. Ben, ça dépend de la personne, pour ça. Il y a du monde qui trouve ça super islamique, là. Ça dépend de la conception de islamique chez la personne.*[56]

This kind of negotiation demonstrates that what is considered "Islamic" dress is constantly challenged and negotiated even by Muslim women in a store that is meant to be specifically for Muslim women. As the employee states, it all depends on the individual's conception of what is considered Islamic.

While N-ti clothes may have certain cultural influences from Muslim-majority countries, these influences are reappropriated into a style that can be encapsulated within a Canadian-Islamic identity, providing clothing that is not available elsewhere. Other stores provide the black abayas imported from other countries, but N-ti serves the Muslim women who do not identify with that style of dress. However, N-ti's management recognizes that cultural and traditional clothing such as black abayas may be something to include in the range of products at some future point.

Canadian-Islamic identity at N-ti is not only about style, but also about the community of Muslim women. The branding is about creating a safe environment in the store for Muslim women, but this identity is contested and constantly re-negotiated by everyone involved. The Canadian-Islamic-professional N-ti identity is in constant flux and never represents one homogenous identity. In fact, Nurmohamed allows for a plurality of voices to be heard and taken into account when deciding what N-ti's Muslim-Canadian brand will be and how it will be represented in the store

[56] Translation: There are people who think it's not very Islamic. There are people, it's not that long, it's too thin, we can see through it. The pants are skinny. I don't know, the skirts are too tight, these things. Well, it depends on the person, for that. There are people who find it super Islamic, there. It depends on the person's concept of Islamic.

Politics and The End of N-ti in Montreal

Charter of Quebec Values

My fieldwork and interviews took place while the debate about the Charter of Quebec Values was raging in Quebec and its effects rippling across the country. At the time, Quebec became an unsafe space for Muslim women as evident in the increased rate of violent crimes against them, which peaked during this time period (Hamilton, 2013, para. 5, para. 7). This debate impacted the environment at N-ti in several ways as well. For one, a law that would stop Muslim women who wear a headscarf from working there threatened the store. As Nurmohamed said,

> *Professional Muslim women, right now, are in state of uncertainty, they're not sure where they stand, whether they're going to stay in Montreal, whether they're going to leave Quebec, whether they're, if they have a future in their current position at work, you know, if people are going to turn on them because of their scarf.*

Nurmohamed identifies the larger economic threat to the business, resulting from the problem of whole populations of people who may be out of work. If Muslim women are not working, they will not have the disposable income, and they will no longer require professional attire.

Nurmohamed also expressed concern about the physical threat to the staff. She talked about the window display where there are mannequins with headscarves and the concern that this could possibly incite violence. As she said,

> *We can't really market to Muslim women here, 'cause if we show heads in the window, it'll be very clear that it's a Muslim store for Muslim women and we're probably going to open ourselves up to some liability. Not to mention the staff, I mean, we had people banging on the door and the staff had to lock the door 'cause she was scared people were gonna come and hurt her, so yeah. Once they see, you know, it's scary. You know, you have women working in the store, if you have to lock the door while you're in a business that's a problem.*

The Charter of Quebec Values served to change the way that N-ti advertised their clothing and the role of the N-ti employees. The employees' main role then became deciding who to allow on the store's premises and how to engage with potentially hostile customers, instead of serving Muslim women. Nurmohamed's feelings about the Charter coloured even her thoughts about Muslim women in Quebec, stating that "*people who have grown up and [were] born in Montreal*

or born and raised in Montreal wear a headscarf, they don't feel like they belong anymore, and it's sad because they don't belong anywhere else." However, even in light of the Charter, there continues to be a need for N-ti. Yet, the store's ability to serve its consumer base of Muslim women became increasingly difficult. For instance, Nurmohamed discussed not putting headscarves on the mannequins, as a way to make the business seem less Islamic.

For Nurmohamed, in a market that does not cater to the needs of Muslim women, especially during a period of heightened political turmoil, N-ti creates that space for Muslim women. However, situated in a political context in which Muslims and Islam are vilified, that space is being increasingly threatened by a public that does not understand it.

The End of N-ti Montreal

I found out N-ti closed when I arrived back in Montreal after the semester break in December. I was speaking to a colleague in a different department who also works on issues related to Muslims, and she told me that someone had informed her that the store was closed. Initially unsure whether or not to believe her, I emailed the store owner, who responded in an email correspondence that she had decided not to renew the lease, as she felt that there was no place for Muslim women in Montreal (personal communication, January 31, 2014). This occurred in light of the introduction of the Charter of Quebec Values when, as mentioned, it was uncertain whether or not Muslim women in Montreal would even need professional clothing. The store closed before I had a chance to decide to complete my research, but I felt that I was reaching a point of saturation in terms of my qualitative data. That being said, it was interesting that the only store in which I was able to conduct research closed down during the course of my study. The closure suggests there is a difficulty in establishing a business for a consumer niche within a niche. There are few people who can maintain this kind of business without funds, name recognition, and without a larger market. While there is a large consumer base of Muslim women across the board, the closure of N-ti and other Islamic garment stores demonstrates that online shopping may currently be the best way for such enterprises to succeed.

The dance that N-ti navigates, whether between consumerist and Islamic principles, or between varying Islamic identities negotiated within the space of the store, demonstrates the complexities of running an Islamic business, specifically an Islamic business that caters to

Muslim women, since Muslim women's identity is never homogenous, and Islamic dress can be expressed in so many different ways.

Conclusion

Several years back when I first started thinking about N-ti as a site of investigation, I initially thought about it as a way to make modest clothing for Muslim women acceptable to the Western public and society, in general. In many ways, as Nurmohamed states, N-ti does attempt to do this. She recognizes that members of the Muslim community who have converted may not feel comfortable in culturally specific attire and even more so, they may worry about their family's response, not only to their conversion, but also to a style of dress that feels foreign. However, Nurmohamed also makes the point that Muslim women who are from Canada may not be interested in styles from the Middle East since culturally they identify with Canada. Issues of career, weather, and style preferences are an important part of Muslim women's lives. In addition to the play of religious and Islamic aspects; there are many facets to Muslim women's choices. I discovered that N-ti was bringing together elements of Islam and Western constructions of fashion. N-ti serves to facilitate a hybrid identity in which women do not have to give up or lose their Islamicness, but are able to take on Western elements of fashion that exist cohesively with their religious beliefs. For example, a customer looking for a headscarf of a certain colour that matches her work uniform symbolizes the integration of both her religious expectations and the demands of her workplace. Her purchases therefore, do not imply a rejection of her religion. N-ti offers her a place to come up with a solution that enables her to combine the expectations of her job and her religion without giving up on either.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, one factor in my initial analysis of the store as aiming to appeal to Muslims living in Western contexts is the way that, unlike other Islamic stores that have been studied, N-ti does not use Qu'ranic verses, does not import clothing, and does not display anything overtly religious in the store. However, after spending time at N-ti, I observed that Islamic identities and practices were still present in a number of ways: employees prayed in the back of the store, the prayer sign on the store front indicated when an employee was praying, the style of clothing was loose and long, female Muslim employees wore headscarves, and mannequins in the store were displayed wearing the headscarf. In short, an

Islamic identity that combines religion with elements of style and everyday life was being enacted at N-ti through the store's operations and the employees' behaviour and actions.

When comparing my work at N-ti with the interviews I conducted with individual Muslim women that I had met prior to my fieldwork and participant-observation, I noticed that the styles at the store were different than what many Muslim women who do not shop at N-ti are wearing. It seems like many of the young Muslim women I spoke with previously were interested in more exciting designs than are available at N-ti. The designs at N-ti are simple, and some of the Muslim women I interviewed do not find the look youthful enough. The young Muslim women that I had interviewed preferred to figure out how to adapt items from mainstream clothing stores to their modesty guidelines, rather than to shop at N-ti. N-ti is also geographically far from the city centers. This makes it undesirable to individuals who want to come into the city center to shop at several different stores.

My experience at N-ti was an important one. As mentioned in my introduction, my time at N-ti was limited to a month of participant-observation. However, I do not believe that a longer period would have added more to the analysis. N-ti is somewhat of an anomaly in the world of Islamic dress. As a Muslim myself, when I first came across N-ti, I remember thinking it was an interesting place to find clothing since it was more Canadian in nature than other Islamic stores I found online. Growing up with a Canadian mother as my primary influence when it comes to Islamic dress, I never connected Islamic dress with cultural attire from Muslim-majority countries. Whenever I saw clothing that was marketed as Islamic dress, it would always be a form of cultural dress that I had no interest in wearing. In that way, N-ti was an attractive clothing source for me. When I first went to N-ti, I purchased two blouses and a pair of pants, and they have served me well. However, conversely, I had already taught myself many different kinds of tactics that I enjoyed and became accustomed to using over the years. Since N-ti was out of the way, a little bit more expensive, and carried clothing in a style that was not my preference, I rarely shopped there. As many women noted in the previous chapter, even though the style of clothing is made specifically for Muslim women at Islamic clothing stores, many Muslim women would prefer to purchase their clothing from mainstream stores based on price, style, and the fact that they can visit several mainstream stores in one day, making the shopping trip a social one. In many ways, N-ti does serve a population, and serves it well, but

the fact that N-ti serves a niche market does not mean all its targeted customers will enter the store.

Whether shopping at Islamic clothing stores or not, Muslim women are in a constant state of negotiation. As mentioned previously, Muslim women are different from one another, and their choices and religious interpretations also vary, which means that their preferences and style of dress will also vary. Even entering a clothing store that is created purposely and specifically for Muslim women will engender a process of negotiation and navigation on the part of Muslim women. The customers who enter N-ti each have their own conception and expectation of what Islamic dress is and what they should find at an Islamic store; when they enter, they may or may not find what they need or want, or they may or may not like what they find. Furthermore, many Muslim women need to find a way to integrate the clothing they find at Islamic clothing stores into their wardrobe and see how to make it work.

Chapter 7:
Don't call it a contradiction

"Don't call it a comeback!"
-LL Cool J

I titled this chapter "Don't call it a contradiction" after the LL Cool J song "Mama Said Knock You Out" which begins with the words "Don't call it a comeback, I've been here for years." I adapted this famous line to address the way in which popular discussions of Islamic fashion imply that this is a new idea, a new invention that relies on new media or blogs, whereas Muslim women have been into fashion for years. This chapter focuses on how Muslim women understand and make sense of the concepts of fashion and Islam. I argue that the Muslim women I interviewed recognize the seemingly oppositional nature of these two terms, but they contend that the relationship involves a more complex interaction than these simple labels suggest. Their answers reveal what I have termed a "Muslimista Spectrum" which captures how they make sense of their choices in regards to fashion and consumption within the context of their beliefs and religious practices. The spectrum, identified by combining the words "Muslim" and "fashionista," illustrates how decision-making occurs within a range that reflects Muslim women negotiations and degree of comfort. In that sense the meaning-making and negotiation I explored in Chapters 5 and 6 highlight the workings of a Muslimista Spectrum.

Islam and Fashion Contradictions

As noted previously, many scholars have addressed how fashion and Islam are seemingly oppositional and how the perception of each term causes a stark contrast. Gökariksel and Secor (2009) state that this incompatibility exists because "veiling, [has a] powerful set of religious, cultural and political references, and fashion, [has] an unmoored system of self-referential change associated with capitalism, modernity and a particular kind of consumer subject" (p. 7). Moors (2007) makes a similar statement, claiming that "Islam as the realm of the spiritual and the sacred, that of eternal values and virtues does not sit easy with fashion, which belongs to the

field of surface and form, and is characterized by rapid change and great fluidity" (p. 320). These scholars exemplify that such a perception of incompatibility hinges more on constructions of Islam and fashion because of what they have come to signify, rather than the actual experiences of Muslim women in the world.

Larger issues in literature on consumption and Islam have focused on the dynamics involved in these practices. Sandikci and Ger (2001) state that "[s]truggle over identity between secularists and Islamists as well as among different groups of Islamists is strongly implicated in the domain of consumption and is constantly transformed as a result of various local and global dynamics and forces" (p. 149). Western consumerism is relevant to the analysis of how new systems are created in resistance. Both global and local elements, Western and Eastern are oppositional factors, but they can be combined as cultural resources to form hybrid identities. In this respect, issues surrounding consumption, marketing, and identity are influenced by different elements, especially in a globalized culture in which the lines of the local and global are constantly blurred, and where a group of people in one location can be influenced by differing factors from around the world.

Consumption Transformed through Local and Global Dynamics

The reason why it is so difficult to make the connection between fashion and Islam is because the image of the oppressed Muslim woman is so engrained and works so perfectly within an ideology that privileges the West as being more progressive than the East; imagining Muslim women as having an interest in fashion serves to shift, if not dislodge, such a dichotomy. These larger philosophical questions are not necessarily part of the practical decisions Muslim women make when they dress their bodies. Ultimately, what I have noticed in the course of scrutinizing online articles about Islamic fashion and popular culture representations, and mining the academic literature, is the sense that Muslim women are expected to have a stronger connection to their clothing or that their consumption is meant to serve as a larger signifier of identity for them as compared to women who are not Muslim. Johanna Pink (2010) warns against adopting such an assumption, arguing that it is important to understand that Muslim consumers are more complex:

> Especially when analyzing the relationship between Islamic religion and consumption, one should be careful not to define Muslims predominantly or exclusively by their "Muslim-ness;"

> like anywhere else, consumer behavior in Muslim societies is influenced by a large number of factors, including gender, social and economic status, ethnicit [sic], and nationality. Muslims have always made fashion decisions that go beyond the choice for or against wearing a veil; and buying a wall picture with the Dome of the Rock is more likely to be a political than a religious statement. (p. xii)

The presumption that somehow there is a vastly different connection between Muslim women and their clothing ignores their complexities, individuality, culture, experiences, and lives. Muslim women need to be defined by much more than their Muslim identities and how fashion operates in their lives is not solely a function of their religion and religious practices though it is influenced by them. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, Muslim women take many factors into account when choosing their wardrobe and putting together their outfits, including aesthetic preferences, personality, lifestyle, and comfort. Hence, the Muslim women I interviewed, do not think of these larger philosophical questions about what it means to dress fashionably as a Muslim on a daily basis; instead, they look at how they can dress modestly with the clothing that is available to them. Their approach was much more practical.

The Muslim Stylists

> *Mais, pour moi, c'est plutôt personnalité, religion, mais c'est sûr que la religion doit dominer là- dessus.* (Imane)[57]

In our discussions, *religion* and *personality* were two ways that participants described their personal style; culture, on the other hand, was a more complex discussion. The most negotiated point was the question of which culture should they define as their own. This introduced the question of their hybrid identities; the many facets that make up their identities and influence their choices. What *was* their culture? Were they part of one culture? Do they have the right to assume ownership of Montreal culture or Western culture as their culture, or do they assert their identity in terms of their ethnic background or source country? It was a question that many of the participants felt they needed to clarify during our discussion. The distinction between what is considered Islamic dress and what is considered cultural dress was raised

[57] Translation: But for me it's more personality, religion, but it is certain that religion must dominate thereupon.

repeatedly. Marie, who identified as Quebecois, answered the question by making this distinction:

> *I could say my culture as well, because I mean, I don't wear, every day, like a kaftan, I don't wear an abaya, I don't wear like the Saudi do, I don't wear…I think I'm dressed as a Western woman.*

She identified her cultural and ethnic background as Quebecois, an identity that is reflected in her clothing. She identified clothing often associated with Muslim women such as the abaya and the kaftan, as clothing that she does not wear. This distinction, however, does not negate the fact that she still identifies her clothing as Islamic.

Yasmin, who grew up in Denmark with Yemeni parents, has an ethnic identity that is different from where she grew up culturally. She made a distinction between what women might wear in Yemen and what she wears. Unlike Marie, who identified culturally and ethnically with how she dressed, but made a distinction between cultural clothing and Islamic clothing, this participant distinguished between cultural and ethnic dress:

> *I think it's cultural as well, the place I grew up in [Denmark], you know, being in Canada and you know that culture, is expressed through my clothes. Not so much my ethnic culture. Except for if I do wear, like for a woman's, Yemeni clothes or Yemeni dresses or abaya for like whatever occasion, but yeah, I usually don't.*

Here, the participant discussed growing up in Denmark and living in Canada, and how those elements are reflected in her style. Traditional Yemeni clothing, like the abaya, is something she might wear for a specific occasion, but not on a daily basis.

Khaoula identified the same way, saying that "*I really considered myself as Canadian, and when I go to Algeria, I don't dress like them, like even if I'm in hijab, I have my own way, so*." She continued, stating that her clothing reflects her religious identity. There were two other participants who stated that they do add cultural elements to their dress in the form of accessories. Bouchra mentioned that she has "*bags like with the kind of Moroccan style a little bit*," while Sally referred to her use of jewelry from the Middle East that reflects the Egyptian half of her background. Ultimately, there are many ways my participants see their culture reflected in their clothing, and these hybrid identities are as complex as their choices of what to wear and to what degree they see their various cultural connections reflected in their dress choices. However, their identifications are not made simply or easily, they take time to analyze

and question what they consider their own "culture." For example, a participant will identify as being of Algerian descent, but recognizes that when she goes back to Algeria she does not dress like the Algerians in Algeria. Even a simple term like "cultural dress" here takes on layers of meaning and self-analysis before arriving at a definition that can be used to categorize their dress choices.

Muslim Women & Style

In my interviews, I was interested to see if these topics, which are covered repetitively in media were major concerns in the lives of Muslim women. I asked my participants about Emma Tarlo's (2007b) conclusion that for Muslim women; their dress can serve as a reflection of their religion, personality, ethnicity, and cultural identity. I was curious with how they categorized their style, what part religion played in their categorizations, and the other ways in which they defined their style. Many of my interviews identified religion as a key influence. Only two women stated that their personal style did not reflect their religious identity, while the rest of the participants said that their style was reflective of their religion. For many, wearing a headscarf served as a clear indicator of how their dress was connected to their religion. As long as the Islamic aspect of their clothing was taken into consideration, they then felt free to make other stylistic choices that were not connected to Islam. As Yasmin stated:

> *I think the most important thing for me is when I choose clothes is the modest aspect, the religious aspect. Does it, does it follow the principles of the religion and I think sometimes I do end up questioning or you know are these pants loose enough, is this dress loose enough or is it too showing.*

For many, as long as the criteria concerning modesty were taken into consideration, then they were able to play and experiment with their style preferences.

Colours

I want to begin this section with a discussion about colour choices. My reason for doing so is to connect the practices of Muslim women in Montreal with the previous discussion of the representations of Muslim women in Montreal. This is exemplified in the Bill Maher sketch I mentioned in the introduction where each Muslim woman is dressed in an identical black abaya. Associating Muslim women with only wearing the colour black is a stereotype that has gained ground and, as I mention in the chapter on representations, Muslim women have been identified,

as Shaheen (2001) describes it, "Bundles of Black." In the discussion of how my participants feel about representations, many voiced the view that they see a difference in how people treat them when they are dressed in black. However, many of my participants stated that they do not have any restrictions when it comes to the colour of the clothing they choose to wear.

As mentioned earlier, Christiansen (2011) noted that some Muslim women will avoid black because it is associated with extremism. She also examined how Muslim women used fashion to create ambiguous and unambiguous style. Ambiguous style, according to her, can be defined as clothing that makes it difficult to tell if someone is wearing clothes out of personal style or for religious purposes. Christiansen illustrates the point with an example of her respondent who is often asked if "her headscarf is Muslim or just fashion" (2011, p. 342). Muslim women are developing new ways to perform their Muslimness that are oppositional to dominant portrayals. For many Muslim women, the discussion on colour is reflexive of how Muslim women have personal ways of understanding connotations associated with different colours and how they feel comfortable incorporating them into their wardrobes.

Imane discussed colour choice as part of the religious element of her clothing, noting "*J'aime beaucoup les couleurs par contre, mais on valorise plutôt les couleurs neutres*."[58] For her, one of her decisions about dress was to not only wear black, but to wear colours that were less showy and more neutral. She mentioned black, beige, and navy blue as appropriate options for her. For her, religion was a consideration influencing the colours and styles that she wore. The showiness of the clothing was not just related to how much skin was shown, but also how much attention her clothing attracted. However, this line of reasoning is also culturally-specific, as other answers demonstrate.

Other participants discussed their personal style choices and their interests in certain colours in connection to their personality, which was another popular way to discuss their personal style. Mrouj discussed her personality and how it connects to the clothing choices she makes, especially in terms of colours.

> *Um, maybe I'm a colourful [giggles] I like colours, and my friends usually told me you are always colourful, you like to change. So my style I want to be, like, maybe different in my style because sometimes, like, Muslim woman decided to wear only dark colours or, like, same style or same thing, but for me I like to change.*

[58] Translation: I love colours, on the other hand, but we value more neutral colours.

> *Sometimes I wear dark colours, sometimes, no, different colours, sometimes as a dress, sometimes you know, like different styles.*

She saw herself as a colourful person and appreciated that her friends recognized this quality about her. The colourful nature of her clothing reflects her personality and identity. Islamic identity is not in question or at odds with her interest in colourful clothing. She does not consider this less modest, but, in fact, regards it as a reflection of her personality. She described these decisions in terms of what she likes to wear and that she does not always wear the same style. Sometimes she wears dark colours, but she changes her colour choices.

Wurood who enjoys wearing colours, also connected her identity to the clothes she wears.

> *Ok, well I'm more of like a bubbly, upbeat kind of person and so, I don't know, I feel like my clothes say that about me. I like wearing dresses and like, stripes, and like all these different patterns and yeah. I don't know, I think that's how if I were to describe the way I dress, that would be it. Modest, modest, but still, you know fairly colourful and bright.*

During our discussion, she described herself as outgoing and talked about how sometimes she breaks stereotypes through her behaviour. She enjoys changing perceptions of what a Muslim woman is and can do, and even though she does not dress to make people feel at ease with her, she does see the benefit of changing people's stereotypes. Her identification as a "bubbly, upbeat kind of person" is reflected here in her choices of colour.

However, Yasmin described the colours she favours in terms that are the complete opposite from Wurood's preferences above, but that are also reflective of her personality:

> *My personality as well isn't really go for bold colours, I really like to just blend in. [I ask her what colours she likes] I think I like, you know, like, soft colours. Sometimes, you've seen my blue pants and I think that was my bravest, bravest buy in a long time and I still am a little self-conscious every time I wear them. But I think you know, things that kind of, they're soft, softer colours. I don't go for like the bold red and bold orange, you know. If I go for red I would go for a blood red, something a little more low-key kind of thing. So yeah, I don't know, I have no, you know, I don't stay away from any colours as long as I don't feel like they're too bold.*

Her interest in softer colours in which she does not stand out is more related to her personality rather than a concept of modesty. She discussed buying a pair of pants that were a bold colour of

blue and that such a buy was "brave," but only brave in terms of her personality, not because they were inappropriate for a Muslim woman to wear or were outside her guidelines of modesty. She also qualifies that if she were to wear a colour she identifies as "bold," like the colour red, she would go for a specific shade of red that would be more "low-key." Personality and dress comfort become major factors in certain choices and go beyond Islamic teaching and practices.

Yasmin mentioned wanting to "blend in," she recounted that a friend had told her that to "blend in" would require different colours in a different cultural context. In their study in Finland, Koskennurmi-Sivonen, Koivula, and Maijala (2004) found that there was a difference in dress between Finnish women who converted to Islam and Muslim immigrants. Finnish women, for one, did not wear jewelry, while immigrants wore quite a bit of jewelry, specifically gold, "since gold is highly valued in the Arab-Islamic culture" (p. 446). In Kopp's (2002) study, many Muslim women in the United States made decisions regarding their dress based on personal or cultural motives (p. 66). For the Muslim women in my study, there were certain cultural factors that weighted more than others, and an individual's ethnic background was not necessarily a central element in their decisions regarding their fashion and style influences. However, as mentioned, different cultural contexts can influence Muslim women's styles. Yasmin discussed the impact that cultural background has on decisions and preferences around colour:

> *I remember a sister [in Islam] once asking me, a friend of mine she was like you know, what do you think, is it, 'cause someone told her that you shouldn't wear bold colours because it's not modest enough and I think it's a very cultural, you know. I remember, a friend of mine from Trinidad, she was explaining to me how she just couldn't go for the softer or the plain colours because where she comes from everyone wore bold colours, then actually wearing something that's plain is standing out. So I'm like, I think it's just my personality and also just being, you know, not, you know, I'm not very out there, I'm very quiet kind of a person, I think it's reflected in my clothes as well.*

What it means to *stand out* and *fit in* is specific to a cultural context; this participant, who prefers to blend in, would stand out in her "soft colours" in Trinidad, where bolder colours are the norm. She demonstrated that her aesthetic preferences have been developed through her personality and her experience growing up in Denmark, a European country. However, as she indicated, her decision to blend in was more a reflection of her personality than a religiously motivated choice.

Style Icons

> *Actually in Montreal, like I said, there's a lot of Middle Eastern people I actually sometimes observe them and their fashion. So I'll say the local people here are my icon because I watch them and all of them are dressed in different ways and there's a lot that you can observe and learn from them.* (Sorouja)

I was also interested to see if any of my participants had any style icons in media who they found inspirational or who have a style they emulate. While one participant responded that she had no style icons, several participants said they look close to home for their inspiration. As the quote above demonstrates, with many Muslim women, specifically Middle Eastern people, in Montreal, there are many ways to be inspired by just what one views on the street. This participant also mentioned earlier that she had recently changed her clothing to dress more modestly and had begun wearing the headscarf. In her experience, the support of Muslim women around her to show and teach her their tactics served to help her with this transition. Other participants echoed how people in Montreal, family, and friends all serve as sources of inspiration.

There were some differing opinions about how celebrities and fashion labels operate in terms of style inspiration. Imane stated that she does not have one icon in particular, but she visits a website called *Hijab Fashion* and she gets her inspiration from the women who are featured on the website. She stated the reason she does not have any celebrities as icons is because not many celebrities cover their hair. Some of my participants did mention specific labels, celebrities, and designers who serve as their fashion icons. Some of these included Coco Chanel, Calvin Klein, McQueen, Kim Kardashian, Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, Pearl Daisy, Audrey Hepburn, and Marion Cotillard. These names include some well-known style icons who are, or have been, visible in popular culture. Many participants noted that these styles needed some adjustments, but the overall quality and style is what they are attracted to, and they figure out how to make it work in their wardrobes.

Finally, I asked these participants about how they define their personal style. Some of the words they used included "practical," "professional," "comfortable," "patterns," "pretty," "no particular style," "classic," "young," "Parisian," "elegant (no sneakers!)," "simple," "relaxed," "hoodies," "black," "unique," "jilbab," "sporty," "natural," "historical," "hippie," and "girly."

These women took pride in identifying their styles and how they were linked to their interests. It is important to note that these terms are diverse and reveal the ways in which style is meant to represent more to these Muslim women than simply religion.

While several of the interviews took place with more than one person present, and there were several different styles in the group, there was no evident pressure that made participants feel as if they had to conform to each other's styles. Rabia identified herself as sporty; she enjoys athletic activities and wears sneakers. Khaoula, from a different interview identified herself as elegant; she enjoys looking feminine and does not wear sneakers for this reason. Zineb talked about unique accessories, especially ones that come from the "hippie" look. Several participants discussed how they required clothing that was practical for their lifestyles. Others talked about specific decades of fashion that they liked and incorporated into their own style. The words used to define their personal styles demonstrate that there is a host of cultural signifiers that are part of these Muslim women's lives and terminology. These responses further indicate that much more than religion is taken into account when dressing; these women also think about others they see and admire in the world, incorporating their specific features into their styles as well.

While these participants discussed how they borrow ideas and incorporate styles, some participants mentioned that they create their own styles, much like the tactics discussed in previous chapters. Sima stated that she is influenced by Muslim women she sees, but she also has her own tastes: "*C'est mes goûts à moi, c'est moi qui va faire mon style propre style, je vais pas perdre mon inspiration*."[59] This demonstrates how these Muslim women enjoy fashion and establish their own styles within a larger fashion industry, while recognizing how they differ from the standards of that industry. It also speaks to the acts of reappropriation that Muslim women take part in to make the clothes available in the market acceptable to them suggesting that this is a continual process, and that these women do not have one fixed identity. They are always re-evaluating what it means to be a Muslim woman and what that entails in terms of their dress. Being a Muslim woman has many different meanings and, as mentioned above, takes many forms depending on the time, place, and the individual. At the time of the interviews, these Muslim women were all at different points in their lives, which influenced their style. This

[59] Translation: They are my tastes, I'm going to make my own style, I will not lose my inspiration.

further dispels the stereotype that Muslim women are unchanging and static, and shows that their lives are fluid and in motion.

Addressing the Contradiction

> *Parce que, peut-être qu'ils veulent que on s'habille juste de abaya et du noir.* (Khadija)[60]

As the quotation above demonstrates, the Muslim women I interviewed understand the expectations of Western society when it comes to their appearance. As Khadija notes above, people expect Muslim women to wear black abayas, however this notion is changing. Reem, for instance, noted that "*a lot of woman, like in Instagram I saw a huge amount from London, from different countries, they show, like they show a fashionable, good clothes to wear as a Muslim and it's the right choices*." Here she refers to representations in the media saying that Muslim women are taking control of their images around the world through social media, and that due to the widely accessible nature of social media, these images can reach many people. These Muslim women are attempting to change these expectations on their own since it will not happen for them.

Nurmohamed, the owner of the Muslim clothing store N-ti (discussed in the previous chapter), comments on the seeming contradiction between Islam and fashion in terms of how she justifies the need for a store like N-ti:

> *It's a difficult one to address because on the one hand, for sure, we're supposed to be humble people, and fashion kind of goes against that, but to fit in this society and to feel comfortable and feel good about yourself, you need to, to some people really need to dress it up, and we're here to fill that need. So, I'm not commenting on whether one thing is more appropriate than another, I'm just filling a need in the market, that's my presence here. If if I don't, you know there are young women who aren't necessarily wearing hijab, there are young Muslim women who are just looking for something fashionable that will appeal to Mom and Dad that they can feel good about themselves in.*

Here, she avoids making a judgment call about whether or not a certain way of dressing is appropriate or not; instead, she describes the need that she is filling – a business logic that also melds with her own interpretation of Islam and dress codes. Though fashion seems to be

[60] Translation: Because, maybe they want that we dress only in abayas and black.

oppositional to people who are supposed to be humble, Muslim women do need clothing to wear and want to feel good about themselves in their clothing. Nurmohamed's responsibility ends after the purchase is made; she is not advocating for how women might choose to wear their clothing, but she is providing a necessary service.

Yasmin noted that there is a risk in terms of how fashion might appropriate and trivialize Islamic principles as in "*letting hijab and modesty become an accessory rather, to, rather becoming the essence of the dress*." She indicated a concern shared by many of my participants that also underpins the Muslimista Spectrum: religion is most important; fashion is secondary. As many participants stated, as long as religion comes first before fashion, then there is no incompatibility between fashion and Islam. If she is wearing the headscarf in order to be modest and the style is secondary, then she is combining fashion and Islam in a balanced, appropriate way. This leads us to the Muslimista Spectrum: the choices Muslim women make on a continuum of what is appropriate, what goes too far, and questioning oneself about what they truly intend to express with their clothing.

Muslimista Spectrum

Most of my participants identified themselves as practicing Muslims. These same women who take their religion seriously also identify their fashion style as "girly" or "sporty," among other descriptions. These Muslim fashionistas (or Muslimistas) negotiate this relationship much like how they negotiate their shopping trips and their lives as Muslim women in Canada. In attempting to answer the question of whether or not fashion and Islam are compatible, I use the concept of the Muslimista Spectrum, which I define as referring to the beliefs of these Muslim women that it is appropriate and acceptable to enjoy fashion and dressing stylishly, as long as it is in balance with and does not compromise their religious beliefs. These Muslim women are constantly evaluating and re-evaluating where their fashion is located on the spectrum. As long as they do not exceed the outer limits of what is defined as acceptable and within the guidelines of modesty, they are fine. The notion of the Muslimista blends together the identity of being a Muslim and the notion of the fashionista as someone who loves and follows fashion. Below, I tease out some of the dimensions of this concept as it is articulated in the words of the Muslim women I interviewed.

Remembering the Guidelines

I think it's possible to be fashionable, but within Islam. (Marie)

In Chapter 3 I discussed at length the guidelines that many of the Muslim women who participated in this study follow. The three broad criteria (long, large, opaque) come up repeatedly in the discussion of the compatibility of fashion and Islam. As Yasmin stated, as long as the guidelines are followed, "*I don't think there, there's a, there's a clash necessarily because there's nothing wrong in having something that is aesthetically nice-looking as long as it lives up to the principles of modesty*." With the guidelines for dressing modestly, Muslim women need to wear clothes to cover their bodies and there is, as one participant stated, no requirement that women dress in an ugly way to do this. Kenza discussed how dressing modestly requires clothing, "*and clothing comes with fashion, so of course they go hand in hand*." As mentioned previously, the guidelines are broad and general, and it is within these guidelines that Muslim women analyze and decide what is appropriate. Below, I go into detail about the decision-making process Muslim women undertake in identifying where they fall on the spectrum and how they come to that decision.

Renew the Intentions

Yasmin commented that, for her, intention was the most critical factor influencing how she dressed:

> *I try to always renew my intentions in terms of when I do find clothes in terms, you know, question myself. What is the reason behind buying this dress, you know, or buying these pants, or buying this, this item? You know, is it just to be pleasing this society or is the essence of it is to cover and look, you know, not representative, but presentable, you know I'm not being shady looking. [we laugh] I don't know how to say it, but it's funny 'cause you know when I, when I go to Egypt or when I was living in Syria my clothes really did clash with the clothes of other, you know, young Muslim women in those societies because they wore other items of clothes even if they didn't wear the abaya they would wear other types of clothes, other colours, other ways of combining things, and a way that really is not as aesthetically pleasing to me. But people would look at me funny because I look like I'm from a different place, obviously.*

Here, she demonstrates how this is a process where she checks in with herself – turning to her own moral compass for guidance. She does not address religious texts or speak to a religious

authority. She spends time thinking about her own intentions and decisions, and reflects on why she would like to purchase an item. She also addresses the context, which as Marjorie Kelly (2010) argues, reflects how Muslim women are perceived. However, unlike the participants in Kelly's study, Yasmin does not change her clothing in order to fit the context in which she is located. Instead, as with Yasmin, they recognize that the way people react to their clothing may differ depending on location. This is how she is able to live and visit many different cultural contexts without having to change her dress accordingly.

Degrees and Limits

Another way my participants addressed their decision-making was to identify certain degrees and limits. As Imane mentioned, fashion and Islam operate well together "*à un certain degré*."[61] The reason for this limit is that recent fashions are becoming shorter and tighter, and strictly following these would not be appropriate for a Muslim woman. As mentioned in Chapter 3, fashion was defined by my participants in several ways. Two ways in which they defined fashion was in terms of what was shown in magazines or on catwalks in fashion shows, or as a more personal definition. Here we see the way in which these definitions collide as the participant understands that how fashion is often seen is through purchasing and wearing the more revealing fashions as they are intended. However, as long as a Muslim woman maintains her standards and guidelines, she can engage with fashion. Imane elaborated on this by also using the word "limit" to describe how she engages with fashion on the Muslimista Spectrum:

> *C'est compatible, mais il faut respecter la limite. Parce que déjà, ce qu'on fait, comme, c'est pas vraiment ce qui était prescrit dans l'Islam parce qu'il faut être modeste, comme je vous ai dit, alors déjà on a transgressé une certaine limite, mais il faut pas la dépasser. Il y en a qui, oui elles mettent le hijab, mais on voit tout, il faut garder sa limite. Alors, oui, c'est compatible, mais à une certaine niveau.*[62]

What she indicates here is a spectrum of choices/styles/tactics that are defined within certain limits so that one can transgress to a degree as long as it does not violate the outer limits. Whether this transgression is through use of colour, pattern, or style of clothing, the individual

[61] Translation: to a certain degree.

[62] Translation: It is compatible, but we must respect the limit. Because already, what we are doing, like, it is not really what was prescribed in Islam because in Islam because it must be modest, as I told you, then already a limit is transgressed, but must not be exceeded. There is that, yes they wear the hijab, but we see everything, we need to keep our limit. So, yes, it's compatible, but to a certain level.

Muslim women who participated in this study are responsible for and in control of these choices. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this limit and degree is vague and how that degree is defined and respected is reflected, again, by how individual Muslim women negotiate and practice their religion.

Degrees and Limits: Different Interpretations

This spectrum, however, operates differently in the lives of individual Muslim women. Marie discussed observing other Muslim women and seeing how at times, due to differences in their approach to dress, they would judge each other. While other Muslim women made comparisons as well, they were often careful to note that as Muslim women, they should not be judging other Muslim women's choices. The quotation below indicates the manner in which limits and degrees are understood and embodied differently by different Muslim women.

> *I saw a very interesting Facebook picture that showed like two girls wearing hijab, okay, but wearing super, super tight clothes, looking at this girl who's wearing, like, who has her hair, like showing, and she's dressed modestly. And they look at her like, oh my God, I can't believe she dares stepping outside without a hijab on, while the two girls saying that are dressed, like, they're naked, but they are dressed, you know? So, I think it's, yeah, it's something that I hear often.*

For Marie, the spectrum is more complex than simply deciding to cover your whole body and wear the headscarf. The interpretation of what is important and what is balanced is different for different women. Limits and degrees are ultimately vague descriptions of what Muslim women do with their clothing, but one that leaves room for negotiation and disagreements between women.

Sexuality

Finally, one of the main points of contention was sexuality, how it is understood, and whether or not it is part of the way a Muslim woman represents herself to the public. The concept of sexuality is certainly one that is constantly discussed when it comes to Muslim women. As noted in Chapter 2, Muslim women are represented as either hypersexual or sexually oppressed. However, as Fatma Nurmohamed noted, having clothes that are appealing does not necessarily have to be sexual. Sexual appeal is something different.

> *I don't necessarily need to wear things that make me appealing to the opposite sex, I still need to feel good about what I'm wearing, so, I need to be appealing to me, right, and so, I'm not out there trying to get the glances from other people, but at the same time, you know, I don't want to be walking around wearing a potato sack. You know, so, I'm not trying to repel people either. Right, so, there's a way that we need to represent ourselves in society and as professional women, as business women, we need to somehow find that balance where we're dressing in a way that's professional and appropriate, and we still look, like, we look good and we feel good about ourselves, without objectifying our bodies.*

Being "appealing," as she calls it, or dressing in a fashionable way, is a way to take pride in oneself, and not necessarily to be appealing to men. On one end of the Muslimista spectrum is the notion of dressing for yourself, for your job, and to feel good about yourself; on the other, objectifying your body and becoming a sexual object which is located at the outermost limits and therefore, unacceptable to many of these women. This is where, as previously mentioned, the concept of renewing intentions come into play, as it places the onus on the Muslim woman to be true to her religious beliefs, rather than be concerned with what other people will think.

Degrees, Limits and Religious Teachings

Several participants reinforced the compatibility between Islam and fashion with references to religious teaching and Sunnah. Sunnah refers to a behaviour that is not obligatory, but exemplary behaviour that Muslims are encouraged to follow. Arij addresses the connection between fashion and Islam in the time of the Prophet (PBUH) as a means to demonstrate the compatibility.

> *Yes, I think, you know, même dans le temps du prophète, they liked to wear silks, and they like, les femmes, elles aimaient ça mettre de l'or et d'être, you know what I mean. Nous depuis, depuis le temps d'avant, on aime ça s'habiller. Si tu regardes toutes les, toutes les descriptions qui fait, qui font de tous les temps de calife and everything women, elles aiment ça porter des silks or colours and they have flowers, and hair, and everything. You know, so, I think yeah, c'est sûr que si tu vas vers l'extravagance, ça c'est autre chose ça, c'est pus religieux. Mais, moi je crois fermement que tu peux avoir un style et rester toute autant dans l'état de l'islam, de pas dépasser les limites.*[63]

[63] Translation: Yes, I think, you know, even in the time of the Prophet, they liked to wear silks, and they, like, the women, they loved wearing gold and being, you know what I mean. We since, since the time before, we loved

She mentions silk and gold as two items that women wore during this period. These examples demonstrate that even at the time of the Prophet, Muslim women were engaging with fashion and that was acceptable. However, she identifies a limit. If a woman approaches "*vers l'extravagance*," then she is too far outside of the spectrum, and her style is no longer in balance with religious ideals. Again, she underscores the problem as occurring when the limits are exceeded.

Finally, dressing well and being clean and presentable is another reference to religious teachings that justify an element of fashion, or a limited amount of fashion. The Muslim women I interviewed discussed how this point is mentioned in religious teachings, commenting that their interest in fashion is not based on a purely individualistic preference. Amal said that Islam and fashion are compatible because "*les choses les plus importantes de l'Islam, c'est la propreté puis d'être bien présentable, donc, on va pas aller comme, je ne sais pas, avec les vêtements déchirés ou je ne sais pas quoi*."[64] Kenza made a similar statement, claiming "*as Muslims you're supposed to stay looking neat and decent-looking, so yeah, fashion and Islam they are compatible, you do have to look respectful.*" Looking neat and well put together is considered to be following religious teachings, not simply making oneself acceptable in society.

While much of this dissertation has focused on the modesty guidelines these Muslim women follow, they emphasized that their appearance is important in many other ways. Appearing clean, respectful, and appropriately dressed are all important elements in Islam, and so while there is an extreme that they avoid, these Muslim women see cleanliness as an important part of their religious practice. Mrouj explained her relationship with fashion as being beautiful for God and representing Islam in a positive way: "*God is beautiful and He likes like human to be beautiful. So, I usually follow this. So, I want to be beautiful and I want to look good, representing Muslims in a good way*." For these women, being presentable is part and parcel of their religious practice and is not at odds with their religion.

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dressing. If you look at all, all the descriptions that make, that make all the time of the Caliph and everything, women, they loved that, wearing silks or colours and they have flowers, and hair, and everything. You know, so, I think, yeah, it is for certain that if you go towards extravagance, that is something else, it is no longer religious. But, me, I believe fervently that you can have style and stay in the state of Islam, to not exceed the limits.

[64] Translation: the most important things of Islam is cleanliness and to be presentable, so we will not go with, I do not know, with torn clothes or I don't know what.

Muslimista Creativity

As outlined in this dissertation, the Muslim women I interviewed have learned to be creative with their clothes and have found ways to make the available fashions appropriate for themselves. When I asked them if the concepts of fashion and Islam were compatible, many of them referred to their creativity. They discussed how they decide on what they consider fashionable. Bouchra commented that it is exciting to think of fashion in relation to Islam because it is about "*negotiation, détournement also, like, you're picking this article, how can I make it more, more acceptable for my religion, not being too much, show too much of my breast and leg*s." This negotiation is about creating one's own fashion and finding ways for it to be acceptable. Sorouja stated, "*Yes, the two are very compatible, but it's the fashion that you have to come up with. Not the fashion, I'll say that is set by magazines or something like that*." She continued that for her, fashion is "*a fashion you have to set in line with Islam*." For the Muslim women who participated in my study, fashion is about decision-making on the Muslimista Spectrum. It is a process of creating fashion for oneself and deciding what it means within the context of one's interpretation of Islam.

Fashion as a Liberating Agent?

My concern while reviewing this dissertation was that upon reading it, someone unfamiliar with Muslim women might view this research as giving fashion or clothing more credit than is really deserved. This is especially so given that most of the mainstream media coverage of fashion in Muslim-majority countries or in the West, designed for Muslim women, seems to suggest that it is a key to their liberation or modernization. However, Sally, a PhD student who participated in this research, shed light on this conundrum. She discussed her experiences at a conference in which fashion and Muslim women were discussed. It was a large religion conference in 2009 that took place in Montreal and there was a panelist who spoke to a full house. Sally offered the following description of the presentation:

> *She did this whole presentation on like, you know, how hijab is fashionable and all this stuff and she started showing like all these pictures of, like, Muslim women around the world and you know I watched and I'm like, duh, you know. Like yeah, why, like, what is so exceptional about these women, it's just like you see Orthodox Jewish women who are fashionable, who see people of all different, you know what I mean, like, why should we all sit there and like clap for you for showing pictures of like, hijab, in Asia*

> *and Egypt and France wearing colourful hijabs. And I hate that, I really do, like, it really pisses me off because like it's not doing me a favour. And I think that it's always been fashionable, it's always been together, and I think that it's, you know, if it looks any different now, it's because the world looks different now. I don't think it's necessarily because of, I don't know, and maybe people have made more conscious choices, I don't know what goes on in everybody's head, right, so like, who am I to presume that it's, it's not something else. But the fact that people who are living in different parts of the world and are seeing different kinds of fashion are having to negotiate different identities and different standards, the fact that we talk about it a lot more now, yeah.*

She describes how the speaker focused primarily on the clothing and how the clothing is represented as a liberating tool, not the Muslim women who wear the clothes. However, Sally's frustration was that the presentation simply showed pictures of women from around the world in colourful hijabs without discussing their process or their decisions. This, as she states, is not doing her or any Muslim women any favours. She connected this panelist's presentation with imperial feminism, or as she said, "white, feminist, patronizing bullshit." The presentation made the women appear as objects of analysis, to be looked upon in a voyeuristic fashion and categorized according to the researcher's schema. Sally continued:

> *Yeah, and I don't think that fashion has anything to do with liberation. I'm really sorry, like, I don't, you know. I think sometimes fashion, like, if we, in there, there's literature out there about this, you know, like, women for example are gonna, you know, force themselves to wear high heels and dress in a particular way, there is a sort of, like, you're feeding into, like, a male fantasy or, like, you're trying to look a certain way in, like, the corporate environment or whatever, and yeah. I don't think that it always liberates you, you know. I don't think that hippies not wearing bras and like peasant skirts or you know I, I just it's you, what you find liberating and like what you don't find liberating, I mean, it's completely a personal thing and not to say that it's not dictated or influenced by culture or religion and family and your profession, and your standard of living, like, all of that says more about fashion I think then, you know, you showing me like whatever, women in Kuwait, yeah.*

Sally's answer to the question about the compatibility of Islam and fashion demonstrates that focusing solely on what Muslim women look like in their clothing negates the more important point of how Muslim women make their decisions and what those decisions mean. Furthermore,

it suggests that Muslim women who are not interested in fashion are not making their own decisions and negotiating their own identity. While this research addresses the question of how fashion relates to Islam, it is also important to recognize that for some Muslim women, it might not mean anything, and that placing too much emphasis on the existence of this connection may undermine the efforts of other women who define themselves in relation to their dress and their religion in a different way. Sally's statement also speaks to how Muslim women are discussed in the media in relation to fashion, as though their choice to dress in a fashionable way, or a way that is deemed fashionable in the West, is to be applauded because it implies they are more liberated than their presumably unfashionable sisters. This not only ignores the subjective nature of fashion, but also suggests that Muslim women are simply following Western fashions without being critical in their consumption.

Conclusion: Creating a Middle Ground

> *Vous mettez le voile pour que vous attiriez pas, ou pour que vous gardiez, comme je dirais vous soyez discrète, mais avec ça vous l'êtes pas vraiment, fait que c'est pour ça que je dis qu'il y a peut-être une certain contradiction, mais ça n'empêche pas vraiment de suivre la mode comme je dis. C'est, ça dépend des extrêmes mais il a, comme dit la religion faut aller dans un juste milieu.* (Zineb)[65]

The Muslim women who took part in this study were certainly aware of the contradiction seemingly implicit in discussing the concept of fashionable Muslim women. Muslim women recognize they are not supposed to attract attention or be immodest. The Muslimista Spectrum demonstrates that Muslim women feel that if their choices are in balance with their beliefs (and they are always putting their religion first), then they are comfortable with their interest in fashion. That aside, many of the Muslim women participants turned to their religion in order to justify that interest emphasizing the need for cleanliness and presentability. Ultimately, my participants did not feel that Islam and fashion are inherently contradictory, but that their compatibility depends on what Muslim women do with these concepts, how they define them, and how they own interpretations and practice of Islam. These women define for themselves their modesty criteria and the limits of what is considered too extreme, too sexual, or too immodest. Furthermore, their intentions for wearing certain clothing were also factors in their

[65] Translation: You wear the veil in order not to attract, or so you keep, I would say discreet, but with that you are not really, it is for that that I say there is maybe a certain contradiction, but it does not really stop from following fashion, like I said, it depends on the extremes, but there is, like religion says, must go right in the middle.

decision-making. In this case, it is the implicit aspects of how Muslim women engage with fashion that is most significant, rather than how they are portrayed to the public.

For many of my participants, deploying a Muslimista Spectrum means creating a balance in their lives in which religion comes first. Ultimately, they do not see fashion as diluting their religion; they only see a problem when fashion becomes more important than religion. Each woman makes decisions about where she fits on that spectrum and what that position means to her. These Muslim women talk about what they see and do or do not agree with, and then make decisions within their respective cultures. As the owner of N-ti, Fatma Nurmohamed, stated in Chapter 2, Islamic dress is a "*personal thing*," and these women are continuing that tradition by making their decisions within a spectrum that works with their lifestyle.

What was most telling about the ways in which my participants articulated their position on the Muslimista Spectrum is that it is a conversation with themselves. This is a powerful way of discussing Muslim women since many of the discourses around them analyze how their decisions are understood by members of the dominant population. The Muslimista Spectrum reflects an internal discourse. While this internal discourse is populated with cultural signifiers, religious teachings, and personal beliefs, it also reveals the way in which a Muslim woman will take these factors into account and make a decision with which she is comfortable.

CONCLUSION:
Muslim Women for Sale

"Sexiness for Everyone. Everywhere."
-Liaisons Dangeureuses Advertisement

Several years ago, I attended a conference entitled "Beauty: Critical Issues," and presented a paper on the reality television show *Jessica Simpson: The Price of Beauty* (Simpson, 2010). The show followed pop star Jessica Simpson and two of her friends as they travelled the world in an attempt to explore what beauty means in different cultural contexts. In each country, the crew meets a "Beauty Ambassador," someone who operated as a tour guide, or at least a beauty guide, as they made their way through the city they were visiting. The beauty ambassador tended to reflect the beauty ideals of the country they were visiting and even embodied the very criteria of beauty that they were critiquing in their travels. While in each country, they visited and took part in several activities in relation to beauty and spa practices. The show constantly critiqued while still reaffirming beauty standards. Furthermore, it suggested that there are certain practices that are extremely specific to each country, which Simpson and her friends investigate during their visit. The hosts showed empathy for the stories of individuals who were engaged in unhealthy beauty practices in order to meet unattainable beauty standards. In Thailand, it was skin bleaching; in Japan, double-lid eye surgery; in Brazil, it was plastic surgery of all kinds; in France, it was being incredibly thin; in Uganda, it was about being large; and in Morocco, it was, of course, the headscarf. While Simpson and her friends expressed sadness about the manner in which these individuals seemed to be struggling with these beauty issues, their conversations were almost forgotten as the group amused themselves later by dressing up in attire reflecting the local cultural beauty standards.

The headscarf discussion was brought up in two separate contexts. The first time was with the Beauty Ambassador during her visit to Morocco. She did not wear the headscarf and discussed how she was not obliged to wear it. In a second discussion, Simpson and her friends

visited several women, some of whom were wearing the abaya and the niqab, and one woman who was not. Simpson had a short debate about showing skin with the woman who was not wearing the headscarf. During this encounter, Simpson was critiqued for showing her legs. In response, she and her friends pointed out that the woman who was not wearing the headscarf was wearing a low cut top, which may be considered more risqué. The conversation did not actually come to a resolution. In the show, the headscarf was featured as a major issue in Morocco as it is a predominantly Muslim and Arab country.

As in every location, the group decided to dress up like the women in their host country and on this particular occasion, they dressed up in long, loose outfits with niqab face coverings. They walked around the city and discussed how they felt wearing that attire. Later on in the episode, they all attended a party with the people they had met along the way, and there were belly dancers present. Again, the two representations of Muslim women present in the show featured specific articles of clothing: the headscarf and the belly dancing outfit. As in every episode, the hosts claimed to have learned from their experience and left with a new appreciation and understanding of other cultures.

At the end of the entire series, the three friends return to California to speak to a group of teenage girls about beauty standards and the difficulties women face in attempting to meet these standards. Following their discussion, all the girls stood up and affirmed that each of them was beautiful. Each of the girls had found her inner beauty and was rewarded with a makeover and fashion show. The moral of the story -- about loving yourself as you are -- is seemingly lost in the lipstick and hair extensions. I suppose they received these rewards for having accepted themselves. Overall, the program attempted to maintain a strong and easy balance between its critiques of beauty standards and women's aspirations to meet those standards. There were no real attempts to overthrow the system, simply a message to love yourself as you are, as long as you attempt to adhere to Western standards of beauty.

This show is an example of, what I term, the "Western consumer's gaze" on beauty and fashion. The representations of Muslim women this particular show features are present in several different popular culture contexts and seem to be not only endlessly repeated, but, at times, even identical. The way that fashion is discussed in relation to Muslim women is either as an anomaly to be celebrated for its Westernizing influence, or firmly embedded in an Orientalized context, whether as oppressive or as hypersexualized. In *The Price of Beauty*

example, Orientalism was at play. Furthermore, the hosts' masquerade through the city emphasizes to viewers how foreign the practices of wearing long cloaks and niqab are for American women, and how rooted they are in a specific cultural context.

This popular culture example deals with key issues relating to Muslim women, fashion, Islam, Westernization, assimilation, resistance, and consumption. In these examples, beauty standards are discussed in reference to dress and fashion, and exemplified through particular styles of clothing. Specifically Othered items of clothing, are seen through the gaze of the Western consumer, more particularly, the female Western consumer's gaze. This example places white, American women as a counterpoint to Eastern, Arab, and Muslim women. Their differences are highlighted, the superiority of Western women is affirmed, and fashion is the symbolic medium used to make these critiques. In *The Price of Beauty*, a Muslim woman critiqued Jessica Simpson for showing her legs. Simpson then attacked the woman who was not veiled for making the comment by stating that her top was low cut. While the notion showing skin is an issue for both, the concerns of Muslim women seem harsher, stricter, and more oppressive, while the American woman seems to be more liberated. The Muslim women who participated in my study were incredibly aware of the way in which the Western consumer's gaze operates in relation to them, their dress, and their activities.

The starting point for my dissertation, as noted in the introduction, was to demonstrate how the mainstream media, a major institution with massive influence, impacts on Muslim women throughout their daily activities. Fashion is one aspect of this strategy. Yet, fashion is also a site of tactical interventions. Through the clothing and fashions available to them, the Muslim women in my study create their own representations. They create tactics and they continue to develop and refine them. These tactics become, then, institutionalized and through their institutionalization, they also mimic common branding, marketing, and consumption techniques in deployed in the Western market (as evident in the case of N-ti). These women are acting as tacticians in a place in which they are observed and surveilled to the extreme, and in which the stereotypical representations of Muslim women in media are constantly recalled and reinforced in the public's mind. How Muslim women understand and engage these images and negotiate their own sense of self is integral to this study. Furthermore, the binary created in the representations seems to leave little room for the nuances of Muslim women's lives and choices.

Western Consumer's Gaze

I began this dissertation with Bill Maher's sketch as it demonstrated the way in which the figure of the fashionable Muslim women is rendered as farcical, even absurd. However, the sketch is a perfect example of how the Western consumer's gaze operates. A white, non-Muslim body stands in for the experience of Muslim women in order to create a commentary on the topic. In Simpson's show, it is Jessica and her friends who recreate the experience of being a Muslim woman and explain how it feels. The Western consumer's gaze also situates what is perceived as "Western" fashion as a sign of assimilation offering proof of purchase of the Muslim women's embrace of the West and rejection of Islam.

The Western consumer's gaze then regards fashion as a way of expressing values such as an openness to sexuality, reflected through the emphasis and pervasiveness of tight, form-fitting clothes, an emphasis on sex appeal in terms of showing as much skin as possible, and of course on attracting men while instilling envy in other women. This gaze requires a strict binary perspective of what is Islamic dress and what is Western dress, and these two have no overlap. Finally, the Western Consumer's Gaze speaks only to style, not practicality, and is not connected to religious values. This gaze is not necessarily accurate in the eyes of Western consumers, but it is implicit in the discussions and representations of Muslim women in popular culture. By viewing style, fashion, and consumption through this gaze, the concepts of Islam and fashion, or Muslim women and fashion, do not connect, as the Islamic factor seems to contradict these values. Viewed through this lens, a Muslim woman who enjoys fashion must be straying away from her religious values, and a Muslim woman who does not seem to be interested in fashion seems oppressed. Recently, it appears that major fashion designers are exploiting this niche market by designing fashions that appeal specifically to a well-to-do class of Muslim women.

Reflections on Proof of Purchase

We don't only suffer

One way in which this research differs from previous studies is that it does not focus on the ways that Muslim women suffer, but rather emphasizes how active they are, how they play, enjoy expressing themselves, how creative they are, and how they experiment. Many of the Muslim women in this study described the enjoyment they feel when shopping, whether as a social activity, to indulge in "retail therapy," or simply because they love fashion and shopping.

Enjoyment is not often attributed to Muslim women and in illustrating this element of their lives, this research counters many of existing representations of Muslim women. Describing how this seemingly innocuous activity, that for all intents and purposes, contributes to the consumerist Western environment, is actually a way in which Muslim women find a safe, Islamic way of amusement, gestures towards a more holistic view of Muslim women.

While this paints an idealistic perspective, many of the participants in this study recognized the many problematic aspects of consumerism. Many discussed sweatshops or pressures to adhere to cultural standards of beauty, but as Bouchra stated, she does not feel like a victim of consumerism. As many participants in this study indicated, they are aware of what is expected of them in the consumer sphere, but actively adapt to and resist those expectations. While they enjoy acting as consumers, they are not blind to the pitfalls, but their engagement with this sphere demonstrates a level of understanding about what they choose to make of it. This perspective of consumption is not unproblematic as there are many ways to critique the consumer sphere. However, this dissertation focuses primarily on what Muslim women do, rather than solely on what consumerism does to them. The elements of enjoyment and activity express an image of Muslim women not only as sufferers, but as women who actively enjoy a lifestyle in a place to which they may not seem to belong, but in which they carve out a space which they can call their own.

Creativity, not a Binary

The level of creativity that is outlined in the interviews that inform this dissertation dislodges the idea that Muslim women's choices with regard to dress are constrained by a binary that pits an oppressed East to a liberated West. However, the creativity of the participants demonstrates that such a binary is not part of the framework they employ to make decisions about their clothing. Many participants discussed wearing both abayas (often categorized as Eastern dress) and clothing found in mainstream clothing stores in Montreal (often categorized as Western clothing) in their wardrobes. In many of the participants' minds, these items are not mutually exclusive, but in fact, they use clothing to serve their own needs. The way in which both of these styles are integrated into these women's repertoire of tactics demonstrates that the binary attributed to Muslim women does not adequately portray how Muslim women "keep their hands in several closets," so to speak. It is not fashion itself, but rather how Muslim women

engage with fashion that is relevant. Fashions that Muslim women create speak to more than clothing; they speak to a larger discussion about negotiation and the creativity that goes into the fashion. It is the sense of invention and reinvention that is important.

Muslim Women in Business

This research demonstrates how Muslim women have also taken part in the business end of the fashion market. Fatma Nurmohamed, owner of Muslim clothing store N-ti, discussed the challenges that come with operating a business that is meant to appeal to a niche market by offering clothing that is stylish while also adhering to Islamic guidelines (both in clothing and in business). The ethics of running a business are sometimes at odds with Islamic values, and the creation and operation of a business like N-ti reveals how these issues are understood and engaged with in a marketplace that is not informed by these same values. In many ways, N-ti is at a disadvantage in a competitive marketplace. Nurmohamed's struggles highlight the difficulties of entering the marketplace, as well as the complexities that emerge once religion is introduced into the consumer sphere. Her engagement with the business sphere demonstrates that Muslim women do take part in the working world and are independent. Her business not only provides products for Muslim women consumers, but also creates jobs for Muslim women who often have difficulty finding employment in a Quebec market that is Islamophobic. N-ti's safe, Islamic working environment lends itself to an analysis of how different spheres converge and how Muslim women, both employees and consumers, work to navigate those spheres. Yet, as with such businesses, the pressures of a neoliberal economy are apparent in the need to produce products that are marketable even if these do not coincide with her own interpretations of Islam.

Participants' Thoughts

This research is not just about clothes. The way in which several participants discussed my research topic was quite interesting. When I finished each interview, I asked the participant(s) if they had any final thoughts to add before we wrapped up. Several expressed enthusiasm for the topic. Yasmin remarked that my research was on "*an exciting topic, I think it's a really exciting field.*" Reem commented that fashion is a topic that many women are interested in: "*I think it's really interesting, I do really like it because it's for all girls, I mean fashion is a big thing. So, combining Muslims and the fashion, it's, yeah, it's really interesting.*"

The excitement around this topic demonstrates that this is a different way in which these Muslim women were being asked questions. Muslim women often become accustomed to answering the same questions about oppression, politics, the headscarf, and war, and so the excitement seemed to emanate from being asked about another aspect of their lives.

Two participants discussed how this research could provide a new image of Muslim women that is not normally discussed. Sorouja stated, "*I'm glad you're doing this topic because I hope people can see things in a different way from a different kind of point of view. I mean, any educational stuff you can get out there is good. You know, so this is great, this is good. Good luck*." Sima discussed how my research could contribute to a new image of Muslim women who wear the headscarf: "*Ça donne une belle image à les voilées et je trouve ça, les personnes prend [sic] la peine pour faire des trucs comme ça.*"[66] For these participants, the topic of fashion and how they, as Muslim women, feel about fashion as it relates to them, was new and could change people's perspectives about them. These different points of view offer a different narrative of what a Muslim woman is and what a Muslim woman could be. In the interviews I have presented, these Muslim women are in charge of creating what that narrative means to them.

Furthermore, while the importance of fashion should not be overvalued, neither should the role of religion. While it is a major aspect in the lives of many of the participants, and for many the most important, it certainly is not the only factor involved in their decision-making. For many participants, religion is the most important aspect of their lives, but it does not negate the other parts of their daily life. It would be a mistake for readers of this research to define the participants solely by their religious affiliation without taking into account the complexity of their lives, choices, and decisions.

Research Goals and Expectations

I initially thought that the issue of representations of Muslim women in media would serve as a larger part in my interviews, as it has been a main focus of my academic work. I had expected my participants to report that their decisions in terms of dress was an almost direct reflection of their thoughts on the representations of Muslim women in media. A direct correlation was not evident in the responses of my participants. They demonstrated a heightened

[66] Translation: It gives a nice image to veiled women and I find that, people take the time to make things like this.

awareness of the media representations of Muslim women and, in many cases, the political context in Quebec; however, they did not discuss dressing as a means of assimilating or resisting these representations. It became evident through our conversations that, though these women are aware of how they are viewed in the public sphere while going about their daily lives and how that view differed depending on what they were wearing, that awareness was not the deciding factor when making their dress choices. My research, therefore, shifted focus from how they responded to representations in media, or in this case did not respond to representations, to how they made decisions about their dress and the factors that influenced those decisions. The result is a much more comprehensive discussion about culture, popular cultural influences, informal networks created with friends and other Muslim women, social media, and the clothing that was available in the market. These participants were not waking up in the morning and dressing in order to shift people's opinions of Muslim women through dress, they were simply dressing for the day. Not every moment in a Muslim woman's life is performed trying to dispel stereotypes or make members of the dominant population comfortable. When Muslim women were cognizant of being representatives of Islam, as discussed earlier, they used their behaviour and actions to change people's perspectives and dressed on the basis of their personal beliefs and preferences. The influence of media representations does play a part in this research, but not as significant a part as I had originally anticipated.

Tactics and Negotiation

The discussion of Muslim women's tactical responses was intended to serve as my main contribution to the field of Islam and fashion. However, I had not expected the manner in which tactics symbolized a larger practice of negotiation in which Muslim women participate in all aspects of their lives, not just dress. As minorities in the city of Montreal, they are constantly negotiating where they choose to go, what they eat, and how they behave. As Reem remarked, it is much more difficult to be a Muslim in Montreal than in her home country of Saudi Arabia, because in Saudi Arabia there are constant reminders of Islam and religious practice, whereas in Montreal, these reminders are nonexistent. Creating tactics for dressing modestly is just a small aspect of the larger strategy that Muslim women living in Montreal practice every day.

"Model minority responses"

A major concern I had in relation to this project was that my participants would behave as "model minorities" and not be interested in speaking about their struggles and difficulties. I thought I would have to prod more in order to receive honest answers about their lives. However, this was not the case; instead, they included measured responses, balancing positive aspects of their lives, ways in which they learned to deal with the roadblocks, and more negative aspects with which they were still struggling. On a personal note, in one of my early interviews I was pleasantly surprised with how three young women, who were the ages of 18, 18, and 19, spoke about their lives with such confidence, a confidence I certainly did not have at their age. I still do not know if this was due to growing up in a more culturally diverse city with more Muslims than I did, or if it had to do with their own personalities, but I found myself having to readjust my own expectations of what their experiences as Muslim women would be, knowing that, as with many people, their experience in the world would change throughout the course of their lives. This was another situation in which I, as the native ethnographer, had to disregard my own expectations and listen carefully to my participants' differing experiences.

Expectations of N-ti

Turning now to N-ti, I first wrote an abstract about the store before I conducted my fieldwork there. In my abstract, I wrote about the way in which the store was branding itself as a Muslim-Canadian store, and how that translated into the particular style of clothing sold in the store. I was prepared to analyze the way in which the store's clothing was exclusive to a certain type of Muslim woman who identified as Canadian, and how such branding seemed to value one type of Muslim woman consumer more than others. I had initially assumed that this would be the focus of the N-ti chapter. Instead, upon conducting my fieldwork, I found that this was only part of the picture. The fieldwork and interviews were integral to my analysis of N-ti, as they allowed a glimpse into how the branding decisions were made, and how such branding was not an attempt to impose a certain style and Islamic identity on its consumers, but rather a back-and-forth discussion in which consumers, employees, and the owner constantly readjusted and renewed their expectations of what it means to dress like a Muslim woman. This showcases how tactics are at play even within N-ti, which represents a more institutionalized strategy for

marketing Islamic fashion. The fluidity between the strategy and the tactics underscores how negotiations are part of a never-ending cycle.

Finally, in exploring the compatibility of fashion and Islam, the interviews reveal the active agency of Muslim women and their engagement with these issues, rather than on how others perceive them. The way they discussed how these concepts operate together demonstrates the deployment of their own standards in making fashion compatible with faith. They discussed their intentions, interpretations of religion, and their processes of decision-making in making sure that the fashion they create is compatible with their religion. This perspective was unexpected, as I had assumed that my participants' choices would be predicated on an explicit rejection of and resistance to mainstream media representations of Muslim women. Instead, they were critical of their own practices, and constantly engaging and renewing their intentions.

Future Research

Upon completing this study, I found there were many items which could have been further explored given additional time and resources. Below, I outline the ways in which this study could be expanded in the future.

While I had many reasons, as stated throughout this dissertation, for using Montreal as a site of investigation, a larger research project could have incorporated more cities or even countries. An early proposal of this research project included Tunisia and France as options to compare against Montreal. Canada, France, and Tunisia are connected in several ways; they all have a connection to France's colonial history, all have had laws proposed and, in some places, implemented a ban of the headscarf. Further, they all have issues surrounding immigration, national identity, and integration. Future research could map this route, comparing tactics employed by Muslim women in terms of their clothing in the various sites, paying close attention to how they are different or similar across these countries.

The original research designed also included more Islamic clothing stores in Montreal. However, practical factors, including store closures, prevented me from engaging with and comparing different Islamic clothing stores in terms of their branding strategies and how they defined Islamic dress. It would have been interesting to also compare the clientele of each store with respect to their engagement with employees and store owners, and the impact of these interactions on the kind of merchandise that the store carried. A further question worthy of

examination is the particular difficulties that such stores experience in seeking to serve a niche clientele.

A related area of investigation would be to consider how age plays a part in decisions Muslim women make about their clothing. Are older Muslim women using different tactics than younger women? What kinds of decisions are they making? Unfortunately for this research, age only played a small role in my analysis, as only a few women discussed how their tactics and perceptions of their religion had changed over the course of their lives. This could be a factor in a study focusing particularly on the lives of older Muslim women.

I would be interested in expanding the fieldwork aspect of my research. In his work, Prus (1998) discusses the importance of understanding not "what people should or should not do but wanted to know what they did" (p. 33). This research did not include an intimate analysis of the practice of consumption, i.e., following a consumer from the point of purchase to the point of consumption. Rather, I focused primarily on how Muslim women understand and explain their consumption choices. However, without joining them on shopping trips or while they got dressed and made clothing decisions, I was unable to truly focus on the "what they did" aspect of Prus's statement aside from what they said they did. I was able to view the clothes they wore to the interview, but was not able to compare these clothes with their actual activities. Moving forward with this research, accompanying participants during purchases through to witnessing their actual use of the products would allow me apprehend the whole process.

Ethics

When I began creating my ethics protocol in order to conduct interviews and fieldwork, I was initially asked questions about whether this topic was "high risk." I was surprised by the insinuation, but throughout our conversation, it became evident that the risk came from the fact that the topic involved Muslim women. There is a section in the ethics protocol that asks whether or not permission is required from an elder in the community before conducting the research, as is sometimes the case in First Nations' communities. I had indicated that no, that would not be the case, but the ethics' officer at the University insisted that there was a chance that there would be women who did not feel comfortable discussing this topic without permission from a male guardian or sibling. In the end, I was required to include a helpline phone number should the occasion arise that something triggered the women during my

interview. I did so begrudgingly in order to conduct the research. It was never necessary for me to use the number and ultimately, my work was not classified as high risk.

The reason I include the above story in my conclusion is to illustrate the way I was being asked to discuss Muslim women as victims (I suppose fashion victims in this case) without agency. I asked myself if such a question would have been asked of me if I were conducting the same research without targeting a specific gender and religion, or if I were focusing on another religion. Of course, I will never know, but my guess is no. The way in which the Ethics Officer made her suggestions was in line with the dominant portrayals of Muslim women as oppressed. These suggestions follow the same rhythm, use the same voice of concern, the same subtle condescension, implying that Muslim women cannot even be interviewed about their shopping habits and interests without those questions triggering some kind of utterly painful feeling. I wrote in my ethics protocol that I would discuss politics, modernity, and other topics in my interviews with participants. The assumption that these topics would be extremely uncomfortable for Muslim women, or that they might require a male family member to be present in order to answer these questions was due solely to the fact that they were Muslim women. At the time, I remember discussing this incident with my family and friends and coming to the conclusion that if I did not include the provisions in my ethics protocol, I would not be allowed to conduct my research, research that would, hopefully, change people's minds about these stereotypes. The experience demonstrates the way that a topic like fashion and consumption can cause concern when connected to Muslim women, and thus, the discussion of agency and decision-making, even when it comes to shopping practices, becomes important. It is my hope that this dissertation helps to dispel some of the concerns that seem to arise when the topic of investigation concerns Muslim women.

Goal: Self-representation of Muslim

The goal of this dissertation was to examine experiences of Muslim women, not just how they identify. What do they do and how do they describe what they do? This is an important point, as it demonstrates agency to being a Muslim woman. I discovered throughout my research that self-representation is important, as is how these women view and describe their appearance and what it means to them. What emerged as equally, if not more important, were the actions that these women take in order to create their appearances. Every visit to the store is an

experiment in negotiation. Every time they close the door to the change rooms, they make a decision about their limits, about what their dress means, about their intentions in terms of their religious practice. This element of negotiation is just as relevant to what people see when they look at a Muslim woman and her clothes. It speaks to the agency of these women; they make their own decisions within their religious guidelines in a society that is not mindful of their needs, demonstrating their roles as tacticians, navigating hybrid identities, and various cultural contexts.

Throughout this research, my aim has been to investigate practices of consumption, fashion, religion, identity, and politics. Prus discusses, the marketplace as a way to observe the roles that individuals take on, but I would also add that it is a window into the roles individuals take on in life as well. This research aimed to question the concepts of fashion and Islam and how they operate together. What does it mean to be a Muslim woman interested in fashion? Is religion part of that equation? Is religion the only part of that equation? My research shows that religion has many meanings, and for my participants, it is compatible with fashion. These meanings are dynamic and influenced by culture, personal interests and aesthetics, and personal religious practices. These meanings are never fixed and these decisions are constantly changing for all the women involved. Even at N-ti, what it means to be a Canadian-Islamic brand is always being renewed and reworked. It would be interesting to reconnect with these participants in ten years and see if their feelings have changed, if they are continuing to use the same tactics, and if they feel differently about the styles they wear or the colours they choose. For many of these participants, religion was described as a journey; it is not something that one knows everything about all at once or ever stops learning and changing. It is also a practice that involves learning from a sense of understanding and knowledge that is shared by other Muslim women.

Islam and fashion are compatible. For these participants, it was possible to enjoy fashion while still maintaining their religious principles. Even for the participants who did not identify as practicing Muslims, they felt a sense of subverting stereotypes through their use of fashion and the choices they make. To see fashion and Islam as oppositional or contradictory is to ignore the individuality, industriousness, creativity, knowledge, and the agency of Muslim women. However, claiming that an interest in fashion on the part of Muslim women is necessarily an attempt to assimilate into Western society overlooks the ways in which Muslim women are able

to juggle different issues and concerns and balance them in accordance with their own interpretations and practice of their faith. So, the next time Bill Maher features a Fundamentalist Fashion show on his television show, he should include the actual tactics that real Muslim women use along with descriptions of what they mean to them. It probably wouldn't be as funny, but at least it would be on a trend.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: QUESTIONS FOR STORE OWNERS

Owner's Information:
-ethnic, educational, cultural background
-age information
-immigration status/permanent residence/citizenship

Store Information:
-When did the store first open?
-How many customers frequent the store?
-How did you fund the store?
-Where is the clothing made?

Purpose of Store:
-Why did you create this store?
-Did you see a niche market for Muslim women's attire? If yes, in what ways?

Muslim Community:
-Do you see this store as a service to the female Muslim community? If so, how?

Branding Islam:
-You brand your store as an "Islamic" store. What does that mean? Is it just in reference to the style of clothing you carry, how you run your business, etc.?
-What does "Islamic dress" mean to you?
-Are the clothes you carry only designed in response to this notion of "Islamic dress" or are there also stylistic elements incorporated?

Marketing:
-How do you advertise your store? What kinds of venues do you seek out to accomplish this?
-Do you use models to market the clothing?
-How did you design your website?

Muslim Women in Media:
-How do you think that Muslim women are shown in media (including film, television?)

Responses to Muslim Women in Media:
-Did you create this store in response to the way Muslim women are shown in media?

Employees:
-What kinds of employees do you employ?
-Are they all Muslim women?
-How do your employment practices reflect the Islamic branding of your store?

Influences:
-Do you shop at other "Islamic" and "non-Islamic" stores?
-What influences your own personal style, is that reflected in your store?

Fashion and Islam:
-What do you think of the idea of fashion in relation to Islam?
-Do you think they are compatible?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: QUESTIONS FOR STORE EMPLOYEES

Demographic Information:
-age, income, occupation, marital status, ethnic, educational, cultural background

Religious Identification:
-What do you think it means to be "religious" and do you identify yourself as "religious"?

Modest Dress:
-Do you believe that the *Qur'an* asks you to dress modestly? What does "modesty" mean for you?

Fashion:
-Do you have an interest in fashion?
-What influences your dress and shopping practices?

Shopping Practices:
-How often do you go shopping (for either ready to spend or window shopping)?
-Do you shop solely for a need for clothing (i.e. practicality), enjoyment, retail therapy, to be up-to-date in fashion, other?

Muslim Women in Media:
-How do you think that Muslim women are shown in media (including film, television?)

Responses to Muslim Women in Media:
-Do you think that the way women are shown in media influences the ways that you dress?

Definition of Personal Style:
-How would you identify your style?
-Do you have any style/fashion icons?
-Does your style reflect your personality, religion, cultural/ethnic background, etc.?

Employment at Islamic Store:
-How has been your experience working at this establishment?

Islamic Branding:
-How would you describe the "Islamic" brand of this institution?
-How is that branding communicated to the consumer?

Purpose of Store:
-Do you view this store as a necessity for the female Muslim community in Montreal? Why or why not?

Community:
-Do you believe that the store serves to enhance the female Muslim community in Montreal?

Fashion and Islam:
-What do you think of the idea of fashion in relation to Islam?
-Do you think they are compatible?

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: QUESTIONS FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

Demographic Information:
-age, income, occupation, marital status, ethnic, educational, cultural background

Religious Identification:
-What do you think it means to be "religious" and do you identify yourself as "religious"?

Modest Dress:
-Do you believe that the *Qur'an* asks you to dress modestly? What does "modesty" mean for you?

Fashion:
-Do you have an interest in fashion?
-What influences your dress and shopping practices?

Shopping Practices:
-How often do you go shopping (for either ready to spend or window shopping).
-Do you shop solely for a need for clothing (i.e. practicality), enjoyment, retail therapy, to be up-to-date in fashion, other?

Muslim Women in Media:
-How do you think that Muslim women are shown in media (including film, television?)

Responses to Muslim Women in Media:
-Do you think the way Muslim women are shown in media influences the ways that you dress?

Definition of Personal Style:
-How would you identify your style?
-Do you have any style/fashion icons?
-Does your style reflect your personality, religion, cultural/ethnic background, etc.?

Institutionalization of Islamic Fashion:
-Are you aware that there are four Islamic clothing stores in Montreal for women?
-Do you shop at these stores? Why or why not?
-Where else do you shop? Why or why not?

Fashion and Islam:
-What do you think of the idea of fashion in relation to Islam?
-Do you think they are compatible?

APPENDIX 4: Participant Information

#	Name/Pseudonym	Date	Location	Length
1.	Wurood	June 21st, 2013	EV Building, Concordia	29 minutes, 20 seconds
2.	Sima	June 14th, 2013	EV Building, Concordia	28 minutes, 44 seconds
3.	Imane	June 14th, 2013	EV Building	28 minutes, 44 seconds
4.	Rabia (pseudonym)	June 14th, 2013	EV Building	37 minutes, 06 seconds
5.	Jasmine	June 14th, 2013	EV Building	37 minutes, 06 seconds
6.	Loubna	June 14th, 2013	EV Building	37 minutes, 06 seconds
7.	Zineb	June 15th, 2013	EV Building	38 minutes, 01 seconds
8.	Mrouj	June 20th, 2013	EV Building	27 minutes, 14 seconds
9.	Marie	June 25th, 2013	Reflections, Islamic Library, Concordia	1 hour, 02 minutes, 09 seconds
10.	Kenza (pseudonym)	June 25th, 2013	Reflections, Islamic Library, Concordia	1 hour, 02 minutes, 09 seconds
11.	Yasmin (pseudonym)	June 28th, 2013	EV Building	57 minutes, 02 seconds
12.	Reem	July 3rd, 2013	EV Building	32 minutes, 28 seconds
13.	Sorouja (pseudonym)	July 3rd, 2013	Outside Tim Horton's,	29 minutes, 38 seconds

			Downtown Montreal	
14.	Dina	March 8th, 2014	EV Building	1 hour, 52 minutes, 11 seconds
15.	Bouchra	March 8th, 2014	EV Building	1 hour, 52 minutes, 11 seconds
16.	Sally (pseudonym)	March 11th, 2014	EV Building	55 minutes, 15 seconds
17.	Amal (N-ti Employee)	November 4th, 2013	N-ti store	44 minutes, 09 seconds
18.	Yousra (pseudonym) (N-ti Employee)	November 4th, 2013	N-ti store	44 minutes, 45 seconds
19.	Khadija (pseudonym) (N-ti Employee)	November 5th, 2013	N-ti store	42 minutes, 07 seconds
20.	Arij (N-ti Employee)	November 10th, 2013	N-ti store	1 hour, 10 minutes, 20 seconds
21.	Khaoula (N-ti Employee)	November 24th, 2013	N-ti store	37 minutes, 05 seconds
22.	Fatma Nurmohamed	November 14th, 2013	N-ti store	34 minutes, 33 seconds