

A discursive analysis of *Hijab* removal: Identity and piety

Fitria Sari Yunianti 

fitria.yunianti@bsa.uad.ac.id

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

To veil and wear a proper dress are among the commands of Allah to Muslim women, stipulated in several verses in the Quran. The term hijab or jilbab is the most important term related to that issue. In Indonesia, wearing a hijab is identical to Muslim women's identity and reflects their piety. However, when one decides to unveil, the negative stigma is unavoidable. This article examines women's perception of the Quran on veiling command based on two aspects. To begin with, the women's understanding of the encouragement of wearing hijab and the women's perception of the verses after deciding to put off their veil. In this study, the theory of religious piety and identity is applied as a conceptual framework and discursive analysis as a method of analysis. This study will present a discursive analysis of women's understanding of the veiling concept. Particularly on their motivation for wearing hijab, veiling experience, and unveiling reason.

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Introduction

In the daily life of Indonesia, a country with a Muslim-majority population women wearing *hijab/jilbab* (veiling women) are easily spotted in schools, restaurants, malls, and other public places. The average age of those who wear the veil varies from kindergarten to the elderly. According to Islam teaching, adult women are required to wear the veil and to wear a modest dress, as said in Quranic verses Q.S 24: 31:

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who know naught of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And turn unto Allah together, O believers, in order that ye may succeed”.

Another Quranic verse related to veil is Q.S 33: 59:

“O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognised and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.”

Aisyiyah, an Islamic female empowerment non-governmental organisation affiliated with Muhammadiyah, one of the prominent Islamic organisations in Indonesia, first introduced the *hijab/jilbab* in Indonesia, aimed to cover women’s heads and necks (Robinson 2009, 49).-- In the beginning, wearing a veil reflects religious piety. It is also aimed at protecting women from man’s gaze. A veil for Muslim women demonstrates the piety performance as the ‘hijab acts as a portal into the Islamic faith’ (Bullock 2010, 23). The willingness to wear the veil shows women’s obedience and responsibility toward their God. Additionally, the veil is believed to indirectly control women’s behaviour, leading them to be more polite and considerate (Droogsma 2007). Study shows that Indonesian women who wear the veil are more disciplined in performing their religious practice and tend to be more mindful and careful with their attitude and dress (Brenner 1996).

The number of veiled women in Indonesia increased time by time. The significant increase of veiled women happened from the 1970s until the 2000s, especially in Yogyakarta, dominated by Muslim students (Smith-Hefner 2007). For Javanese women, wearing the veil is not only based on the Islamic religion. It also represents the Javanese culture and modernity image. Wearing the veil is believed to fulfil one of the Islamic teachings (Kusciati, Susilorini and Febriary 2013). This phenomenon goes hand in hand with the various motive behind wearing the veil. In addition to showing piety, Indonesian women also function the veil as an identity marker (Wagner, et al. n.d.). Thus, Muslim women can be recognised by their veil. It distinguishes them from women from other religions. The veil is the most apparent religious symbol compared to other religious symbols such as a necklace or earring with a religious pendant. Mainly, wearing a veil also symbolises piety. For instance, in Batam, where the city is known as an industrial and city of entertainment, women wear veils to show that they are virtuous women. With this appearance, people will not assume them to the part of prostitution (Robinson 2009, 100). Besides the identity marker, from 1970-to 1980, the veil also symbolised the Islamic revival movement among Muslim students. This movement is influenced by the Muslim women worldwide trend, where veiling is the expression of support and solidarity towards minority Muslim women worldwide (Woldesemait 2013, 9-12).

In some countries, like in the United States, veiling Muslim women are treated dishonourably, unfair, and discriminated against due to veiling women's negative perception, especially after 9/11 (Blakeman 2014, 150). According to Bullock (2010, 4), there are different ways to view the veil from Eastern and Western points of view. Veiling is seen as an oppression

of women, which limits their freedom. Also, veiling is regarded as Muslim and Islam's inferiority and backwardness turn to extremist action (Jones 2010). In a recent development, in the Indonesian context and piety performance and identity motives, one wears a veil because of fashion, which often shows a consumerist and hedonistic lifestyle (Zinira 2017). Women wear the *hijab* more stylishly compared to two decades ago. Later, wearing a particular *hijab* style reflects the social and political interest and inclination (Patton 2010, 24).

Notwithstanding my observation, not all women wearing the veil in public places wear their mantle at home or in their daily neighbourhood. The kids, for example, might wear the veil only when going to school since the veil is the part of their school's uniform. As well as the elderly, they might wear the veil when they go to the hospital, market or public places that are far from their home or when they attend a social or religious gathering. They might not wear the veil when they visit their close neighbour or do groceries in their house surrounding. In the Indonesian context, this fact is more permissible in society due to the understanding that the veil is appointed to adult women, where the kids and elderly are exceptions. However, the veil removal phenomenon also occurs among adult women. Moreover, this removing veil is permanent; that is, women who previously wore the veil then continuously do not wear the veil, whether in public or private spaces. Muslim women who remove their veil often obtain a negative stigma in society. Muslim women who do not wear the veil are seen as losing their identity (Wijayanti 2017, 152).

Based on the phenomenon described above, this study focuses on the experience of women who remove their veil, specifically their understanding of Quranic verses related to veiled command and the concept of piety and religious identity, before and during wearing the veil and after removing the veil. The data was generated by interviewing three women (RZ, DD, and AD) who experienced veiling removal after a certain period of wearing the veil. Specifically, the interviewees are students of state and private Islamic universities who are obligated to wear the *hijab*. The interview then was analysed using critical discourse analysis offered by Fairclough (1992). First, the interview is analysed from linguistic practice (description). Second, it is analysed from the discursive practice (interpretation). Interpretation "is generated through a combination of what is in the text and what is in the interpreter, in the sense of the members' resource which the latter brings to interpretation" (Fairclough 1989, 141). The third stage is social practice (explanation). This stage focuses on how the discourse practice is reproduced and what is the effect of what the interviewees say (Fairclough 1989, 163). Since the interpretation and explanation often go together, these two steps are merged. However, in this study, the analysis stages are not strictly divided into two phases but instead presented in a holistic narration.

Discussion

Analysis of Linguistic Practice

This stage is used to look at the vocabularies in the text (interview) that consist of overwording, rewording and alternative wording. Additionally, grammar usage in this interview, including sentence features such as passive-voice, nominalisation, modality, and agency, is considered (Fairclough 1992, 76-77).

My veil is my identity

Asked about the motivation of wearing a veil, there are various intentions underlie of wearing a hijab; RZ said: "I saw the girl who wears the veil is elegant, moreover, when I saw my aunties, they wear the veil but like ukhti-ukhti veil, truly ukhti. They wear a very loose veil, seriously....and they wear gamis (long dress), even one of my aunties wears cadar. They really seemed motherly; they seemed so elegant. I felt peace when I saw them". In this text, RZ mentioned the overwording word, 'ukhti'. This overwording shows the importance of this concept related to veiled women. In the Indonesian Islamic context, ukhti is taken from Arabic means sister. This word is used explicitly to address Muslim women who wear the loose hijab. She also said 'elegant' two times and 'motherly' as an alternative word to 'elegant'. From RZ's point of view, motherly and elegant are veiled women's portraits that show women's beauty and grace. Thus, RZ was impressed by the positive image of veiled women.

Meanwhile, AD said: "I've been wearing the veil since I was in junior school because I studied at an Islamic school. But when I was in Junior high school, I studied in public school and still wore the veil. I joined the Muslim student forum in school, and every Saturday, there was a short sermon. It was said that wearing the veil is better. But sometimes I removed the veil until I studied in the college; I was consistent with wearing the veil." The overwording used in this text is the word 'veil'. Additionally, the alternative wording related to Islamic terms is also used in this text, such as Islamic school, Muslim student forum, and the short sermon, which describes the method of Islamic teaching transfer knowledge. What can be drawn from this text is that the environmental influence and Islamic doctrine were why AD was wearing the veil. Unlike RZ and AD, DE's motive for wearing a hijab had nothing to do with religious reasons. DE said: "when I was in senior high school, I was fat and a bully victim. I realised that I could not wear my favourite clothes (short skirt), so I should gag those who bullied me by covering my body." The passive voice of the sentence "I was a bully victim" shows that whoever bullied them is less important. DE more paid attention to the body image by mentioning 'fat' and 'body', which triggered bullying.

Asked if the veil is their identity as Muslim women, RZ answered: "Once my uncle asked me to help him to cook for the assignment, he is a student of vocational college major of culinary art

at college affiliated with Christian, I wore the veil in the middle of the non-Muslim students. I don't know why I did [wearing the veil], but...it was like wearing the veil is my identity." Riza mentioned 'Christian' and reworded it with 'non-Muslim' along with the identity. Hence, the veil is the sign of identity that differentiates her from other religious followers. Same as RZ, who clearly stated that the veil is her identity, DD agrees that the veil is Muslim identity, as she said: "in my opinion, from the first sight...there is a stereotype that [women wearing a veil] is a religious person. So, there is a limitation. When I met a man, I could not recognise him as religious or not, so I would ask him to shake hands because I couldn't distinguish him from a non-religious man. But for the religious girl, she will be safe [from the shake hand] because she is recognised. This [stereotype] is society's perception, but I believe in that." The word 'religious' is overworded mentioned by DD, where she affiliated the veil with 'religious' than merely 'identity'. Unlike RZ and DD, AD does not entirely agree that the veil is a Muslim identity. She answered: "Because my Islamic identity is not only my veil but my attitude".

Asked if the veil guarantees one's piety, RZ answered: "Yes, she should be devout. But the fact, some people wear the veil because of following the fashion trends or just following their friends, and they are not aware of the true intention of the veil. It depends on the personality because some of those who wear the veil but their clothes are sexy, then, ehm, if someone who wears the veil understands religious teaching, which one of them is prohibiting pacaran (dating), but they did; riding one motorcycle with her boyfriend, cuddling with her boyfriend, even they are not shy to show the affectionate in public, and, I am as a Muslim, O Allah, I am ashamed with these [fact]...so you should keep the elegance of people who wear the veil". In this narration, RZ mentioned 'elegance' as the rewording of 'devout', which shows the worth of these concepts related to the veil. She also stated the pronoun 'she', 'you' and 'they' when referring to those who wear the veil and exclude herself, her experience as a veiled woman. However, she said, 'I am ashamed of these [facts]'. By doing so, she put herself as an outsider who imaging the veiled Muslim women should be devout, but she experienced the opposite, and somehow it disappointed her. She also exemplified dating and cuddling with the man as an impiety act.

RZ also mentioned, "Wearing the veil is for covering the aurat, to keep ourselves. But sometimes I see my friends who wore the veil, often they are the kiai's daughters, but they wore the fashionable veil. They knew the meaning of the veil, don't they? Ya, if they wear a jilbab, they should cover their breast, do not wear tight clothes and be sexy. Nowadays, some of them wear the veil because they want to be seen as more beautiful. But still.....yeah...it's okay, I want to be like this, okay...okay...it's better to me to be myself, I am not hypocritical." In this sentence, RZ mentioned 'wearing the veil is covering aurat (part of women's body that allowed to be seen)' and again rewording it with the sentence 'to keep ourselves. However, she used conjunction 'but' to show the contradiction, that women wear veils only for fashion purposes. She said

overwording 'okay' three times to support her decision to take the veil off and calls herself non-hypocritical.

Whereas RZ believes the veiled woman should be devout, AD is doubtful in this argument, as she said: "I don't know because everything depends on the attitude and not the appearance. I think it cannot always be correlated that those who wear the veil should be pious because I think it is the same between those who wear the veil and who do not. They wear the veil but still gossiping others. The veil is to protect, I don't know. But for now, it backs to the attitude" AD said 'everything depends on the attitude' and it is reworded by 'it cannot be always correlated that those who wear the veil should be pious'. She also states 'I don't know' twice and 'I think' which supports her hesitation on this correlation. In this text, she stressed the importance of the attitude compared to hijab, and she exemplified gossiping as an impiety act.

Meanwhile, DD answered: "Ehm...I don't care about someone's piety, that is your business with your God, as far as they maintain good relations with others, it is enough. I know the veil is to protect, but I don't care because basically, I am not a religious person" Hence, DD mentions 'I don't care, 'it is your business with God' and I am not a religious person consecutively. Hence, she declares that what she does has no relation to religion at all. Also, DD sees that having a good relationship (with people) is part of piety.

I just unveil my veil, I did not change

Asked the reason of remove the veil, RZ answered: "I worked as an internet shop operator...and I still wear the jilbab. So, there are three operators there, including me. Basically, all of us wearing a veil. But one of my friends wears a hijab only when she goes to campus. When returning from campus, she takes off her hijab. I was a bit shocked. "Oh...she actually wears a hijab, but why does she take it off? I asked myself. "Oh...okay okay okay okay, if she felt comfortable with that and no justification from society, I thought it would be no problem for me too to uncover my jilbab. Then (the next day) I took off my jilbab, but my friends were shocked. All my friends were asking me [why], including my boss." RZ says 'okay' four times which shows overwording. She also rewords the word 'okay' with 'no problem' to convince her that it is fine for her to remove her veil.

Having experienced wearing a veil for more than three years, RZ uneasily reacts to her surrounding responses. She said: "My boss was shocked and asked why I took off my veil. I answered that I was not ready yet because of the requirement for who wearing a veil, according to me is if someone has decided to wear a *jilbab*, she should be really careful to keep that *jilbab*. Not only wearing a *jilbab* but her breast is still visible, still wearing sexy clothes, even more fashionable. So, until now I don't wear the veil." In this text, RZ mentioned the modal verb 'should' to describe the requirements of wearing the *jilbab* and followed by the conjunction 'but'

to disprove the fact that those who wear *jilbab* do the opposite.

Meanwhile, AD decides to remove her veil after having a long contemplation. She said: "Ehm...if I evaluated myself, I felt that at that time [junior and senior high school] I was so innocent, always following what people said, what they told me, if they said this, I always obeyed. I didn't quest why and I was not that critical at that time. They said that it [wearing a veil] is obliged, so I did. But then I know that so many *tafsir* related to the verse of covering aurat, it depends on what *tafsir* you believe. The most important thing for me is the attitude." In this narration, AD mentions 'always following what people said' and she rewords her statement with 'what they told' 'if they said this, and 'I always obeyed'. Hence, AD tells his experience in doing certain acts because she is asked to do so. However, she uses the conjunction 'but' in the sentence 'But then I know' to show the contradiction. She contradicts between 'innocent' and 'critical'. It negates the previous action, that she shouldn't be innocent but be critical.

After 10 years of wearing a hijab, AD got negative comments from her friends. AD said: "Some of them protested me [removing my veil]. They asked me why I changed. I will not explain to them why, if you don't like to be my friends anymore...it's okay. I didn't change, my attitude is still the same, still the same despite my appearance." Here, AD mentioned overwording "changed" and "still the same" two times which is also the alternative word for each other. Hence, AD convinces them that she only changed her appearance, not her attitude and personality.

Meanwhile, DD said: "But then I realized that bullying is not my fault, it is their own fault (bullying doer), it is their perspective. So that, I don't care about that and I just wear the clothes I feel comfortable with." In this text, DD mentioned 'bullying is not my fault' and then reworded it by saying 'it is their own fault' and 'it is their perspective'. Since DD wears a veil only for a year, she did not face negative feedback from people around her. As she stated: "My mother realized that all children have their own decision. So, she only could suggest, persuade and woo me. But overall, the decision is in my hand". In this narration, DD mentioned the word 'decision' two times which is overwording. This rewording reflects the importance of one's decision in wearing the veil. In addition to that, she also said 'suggest' and followed by the alternative wording 'persuade' and 'woo' to show that the decision to wear 'hijab' does not come from an external factor, but from her own.

Analysis of Discursive and Social Practice

The analysis of discursive practise is the analysis of the interpretation and explanation. Interpretation "is generated through a combination of what is in the text and what is in the interpreter, in the sense of the members' resource which the later brings to interpretation" (Fairclough 1989, 141). Meanwhile the social practice focuses on how the discourse practice is reproduced and what is the effect of what the interviewees say (Fairclough 1989, 163).

They just don't wear a 'right' veil

In the beginning, RZ was impressed by the '*ukhti*' who creates the positive image of those who wear the veil. In Indonesian context, the term *ukhti* used to address respectfully the women who wearing the loose veil. According to Islamic teaching, Muslim women clothes should meet the requirement such as covering all the body except the face and the palm, loose that not showing the curves, and not attracting men's attention (Wijayanti 2017, 165). In general, there are three types how women wearing the *hijab* (Nef-Saluz 2007). First, those who wear *cadar* as what her aunty wear. *Cadar* is the type of clothes that covers all the body except the eyes. The number of *cadar* wearers in Indonesia is few and often they are considered an extreme group. Second, those who wear the loose veil and skirt. They belong to the conservative group who are considerate of their interaction with men. Third, those who wear '*jilbab gaul*' where dominate the type of hijab. In her interview, RZ recalled this type of '*jilbab gaul*' by mentioning 'they wore the fashionable veil', 'they should cover her breast, do not wear the tight clothes and sexy'. As *the hijab* is aimed to protect women from any sexual harassment (Nurmila 2009), veiled women are also advised to dress modestly and not to show off (Yulikhah 2016, 101).

At a certain point, *jilbab* and pious become the business commodity in Indonesia which shows the Islamic capitalization (Sukendro, Destiarman and Kahdar 2016, 247). However, the understanding shifting of hijab from religious obedience and piety into more profane is not always negative. Research on the *Tuneeca Lover* community which consists of women wearing veils in a more fashionable way presents that try to put the religious obligation wearing *hijab* into a more modern setting. On one hand, they are committed to performing Islamic teaching doctrine by wearing a veil, and on the other hand, they redefine the hijab which is commonly viewed as old fashioned and traditional (Nuroniya 2019) (Saraswati 2019). Additionally, the hijab is also seen as the act of rejection of modernity (Anatunes 2022). The mushrooming of veiled women also shows that *hijabi* (women wearing hijab) is one of the popular pieties in Indonesia among *hijrah* movements, Arabism, and *dakwah* (Wildan and Witriani 2021).

My piety is not defined by the veil

For Indonesian women, wearing a veil reflects their religious identity, piety, modesty, and agency (Juwariyah 2019). In terms of piety, veiled women are expected to fulfil the people's image of piety. Some studies show that there is a positive correlation between students who wear *hijab* with their discipline in performing prayer, fasting, and other good deeds based on Islamic teaching (Budiyanti 2017, 208) (Noer, Tambak and Faridah 2016). However, the piety is not only performing religious ritual. Among Indonesian, avoiding the promiscuity, particularly free sex is regarded as the piety performance. Thus, veiled women are expected can protect themselves from this juvenile delinquency.

Related to the polity and behavior, the research conducted among middle- and upper-class women in Jakarta shows that there is a positive correlation between the veiled women with the appearance, politeness, and proper behaviour in public space (Utomo, et al. 2008). Besides, they are also acknowledged as good Muslim who love to read the religious texts and watch the Islamic sermon via television or another platform on social platforms. The images of veiled women described above are in accordance with RZ's expectations of veiled women. However, what she found was the opposite, as she stated, "if someone who wears the veil understands religion teaching, which one of them is prohibiting *pacaran* (dating), but they did; riding one motorcycle with her boyfriend, cuddling with her boyfriend, even they are not ashamed to show the affectionate in public."

The standard of piety is vague. As AD stated, "it cannot always be correlated that those who wear the veil should be piety. They wear the veil but still gossiping others". AD refers to the daily lives of veiled and unveiled women, where the veiled women also often perform misconduct behaviour. AD emphasized that the piety standard is the attitude. This critical statement is in line with Galdari (2012, 122) who stated that the hijab is not only understood as the physical looks but more importantly spiritual aspects. She describes how is the veiled women only allowed to reveal their bodies to their husbands, the veiled women only can open their hearts to their God. Although the standard of piety is debatable, social pressure on those who wear the veil is undeniable. Human Right Watch reported (2021, 85) reported that some governmental offices force their women officers to wear the veil and give the punishment to those who are disobedient. Additionally, those who wear the veil because of the coercion from their parents got mental pressure. Even, though some of them need help from a psychologist often the pressure triggers them to do suicide (Watch 2021, 85).

My body is my right

Every person has a personal reason for wearing a *hijab*. Some of the reasons for Indonesian women wearing the veil are the awareness that at one time eventually she will wear the veil, the guilty feeling of getting older and still not wearing a veil, mother's coercion, wearing a veil is considered fashionable, a compulsory (religion's command), following *ustadz* (priest) advice, following friends who wearing a veil and being permitted wearing jilbab in office (Soekarba and Melati 2017). Besides, one wears the veil because of school regulations, spiritual experience, and motivation to find a religious husband (Bennett 2005). Thus, one wearing the veil because of her willingness, regulation, and environmental influence (Rahayu and Fathonah 2016).

Having different motivations to wear hijab, my three informants also argue different reason to take it off. Realizing that veiled women does not always represent the images of veiled women who is associated with the piety and virtuous, RZ decided to unveil her veil. RZ called the

incapability to maintain the positive image of veiled women as a hypocrite. RZ experienced on this disappointment conforms another woman experience on unveiling the veil. The feeling of hypocrite leads women to unveil the veil because they don't want to ruin the positive image of veiled women (Fitri and RA 2013, 18-9). The lacking understanding of Islamic teaching is also considered a factor that makes women remove their veils.

However, in AD's case, the more she understands the Islamic teaching, the more she knows that wearing a veil is not obligation. As she mentioned: "But then I know that so many tafsir related to the verse of covering *aurat*, it depends on what tafsir you believe". Being evaluative on herself and critical after many years of following what *ustadz* advised, brings AD to seek more information related to the obligation of wearing the veil. As she said: "Ehm...if I evaluated myself, I felt that at that time [junior and senior high school] I was so innocent, always following what people said, what they told me, if they said this, I always obeyed. I didn't quest why and I was not that critical at that time. They said that it [wearing veil] is obliged, so I did". The negative comments from her surrounding who judge the changing and even the lost identity does not hurt AD. AD argued that he does not change, she is still the same, despite her appearance, as she said: I didn't change, my attitude is still the same, still the same despite my appearance. "Thus, The AD point of view of piety concept shifts from the physical appearance to the personality's attitude.

Conclusion

To conclude, there are different intentions underlie why one wears the veil, such as obeying the doctrine, expecting to become more virtuous, and even non-religious motives. Although the veil is believed to the part of Islamic identity, veiled women do not always reflect an Islamic attitude. Having experienced disappointment when the reality does not meet the expectation, critical thinking towards the religious teaching and self-acceptance lead women to uncover their veil. The decision to remove the veil triggers various responses from society, and most of the time, people see this decision change their dignity.

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