Between Dogma and Lifestyle: Reinterpreting the Hijab in the Era of Commodification through the Perspectives of Mernissi and Wadud

Bayu Firman Alamsyah[1*], Mundhir[2]

[1,2]State Islamic University of Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia

Abstract

This study is motivated by the theological and sociological tensions in contemporary hijab phenomena, where symbols of piety are often reduced by the commodification of the fashion industry. This study aims to deconstruct the static understanding of hijab and reformulate the concept of decency amidst the currents of lifestyle trends. Employing a qualitative library research method with a comparative approach, this research synthesizes the critical thought of Fatima Mernissi (historical deconstruction) and the tawhidic hermeneutics of Amina Wadud (substance reconstruction). The results indicate that the hijab is not an ahistorical dogma, but a dynamic cultural medium. The main finding of this study is the concept of "contextual ethics of decency" as a middle path; a synthesis positing that clothing forms may change according to the context of the times (per Mernissi's historical critique), provided that the principles of moral integrity and piety remain its core essence (per Wadud's interpretation). This study concludes that the desacralization of hijab by the market need not be responded to with anti-modernity rejection, but rather with the strengthening of women's moral agency. Consequently, the parameters of piety shift from visual formalism to dignified public ethics, providing theoretical legitimacy for modest fashion as a valid yet spiritual expression of identity.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh ketegangan teologis dan sosiologis dalam fenomena hijab kontemporer, dimana simbol kesalehan sering kali tereduksi oleh komodifikasi industri mode. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mendekonstruksi pemahaman hijab yang statis dan merumuskan ulang konsep kepatutan di tengah arus gaya hidup. Menggunakan metode kualitatif kepustakaan dengan pendekatan komparatif, penelitian ini menyintesiskan pemikiran kritis Fatima Mernissi (dekonstruksi historis) dan hermeneutika tauhid Amina Wadud (rekonstruksi substansi). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hijab bukanlah dogma ahistoris, melainkan sarana budaya yang dinamis. Temuan utama studi ini adalah konsep "etika kepatutan kontekstual" sebagai jalan tengah; sebuah sintesis yang memandang bahwa bentuk pakaian dapat berubah sesuai konteks zaman (sebagaimana kritik sejarah Mernissi), selama prinsip integritas moral dan ketakwaan tetap menjadi esensi utamanya (sebagaimana tafsir Wadud). Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa desakralisasi hijab oleh pasar tidak perlu direspon dengan penolakan anti-modernitas, melainkan dengan penguatan agensi moral perempuan. Implikasinya, parameter kesalehan bergeser dari formalisme visual menuju etika publik yang bermartabat, memberikan legitimasi teoretis bagi modest fashion sebagai ekspresi identitas yang sah namun tetap spiritual.

Kata Kunci: Fatima Mernissi; Amina Wadud; Komodifikasi Hijab; Etika Kepatutan Kontekstual; Hermeneutika.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Islamic discourse, the hijab often undergoes an extreme reduction in meaning: shifting from a concept of social morality to a mere textile formality (Ramadana, 2022). This phenomenon is not a simple matter of dress codes; rather, it touches the core of how Muslims understand the relationship between sacred texts, tradition, and an ever changing social reality. Normatively, mainstream theology often freezes the hijab as a static, ahistorical obligation a single, non-negotiable parameter of female piety (Indriani, 2023). Such a view tends to overlook the fact that Qur'anic revelation occurred within a specific historical context, with all its surrounding social, political, and cultural dynamics. Consequently, a "stagnation" of meaning occurs, causing the hijab to lose its elasticity as a living ethical concept that evolves alongside human civilization (Ramadana, 2022).

However, today's sociological reality reveals an anomaly that cannot be ignored (Merlins, 2024). The hijab has been swept into a whirlpool of industrial commodification and popular culture trends that obscure its spiritual essence (Waqhidah & Pratamia, 2025). On one hand, we see an increasing number of Muslim women wearing the hijab, a phenomenon that statistically shows a rise in religious awareness. On the other hand, the styles displayed are often contradictory to the values of modesty and self-protection the very spirit of the hijab command itself (Nurhalimah et al., 2025). Modern hijab styles, characterized by various accessories, striking makeup, and body-contouring clothes, have become common in both public spaces and social media. This tension between the hijab as a symbol of transcendental obedience and the hijab as a cultural product demands a profound and responsible re-reading.

The urgent academic question is no longer "is the hijab mandatory?", but "how do we reformulate a concept of decency that remains religious yet relevant to the modern context, without being trapped in symbolic formalism?". This question is crucial because it concerns how sacred texts can remain a guide for life amidst rapid social change. If the hijab is understood only through a legal-formalistic lens, it will become an increasingly irrelevant burden. Conversely, if it is understood too loosely without a normative anchor, it loses its function as a distinction between truth *(haqq)* and falsehood *(batil)* (Nurhalimah et al., 2025). A middle path is required to accommodate both poles.

In the Indonesian context, this shift in meaning is further complicated by the intersection of identity politics, religious commercialization, and popular culture (Maghdalena & Lessy, 2024). Since the early 2000s, the emergence of "hijabers" communities, local Muslim fashion brands, and the proliferation of "hijab ootd" content on social media have turned the hijab into more than just a *fiqh* issue; it has become cultural capital and a symbol of the urban middle-class Muslim undergoing social mobility (Setiawan et al., 2024). This phenomenon confirms that the hijab operates within overlapping layers: as a symbol of personal piety, a marker of group affiliation, and a market differentiation strategy for the Islamic fashion industry. At this point, the reduction of the hijab to a mere lifestyle exacerbates the tension between theological and socio-economic dimensions. Cultural observers even note that the modern hijab phenomenon has created a highly profitable new market segment, with an economic value reaching billions of rupiah annually. The Muslim fashion industry is growing rapidly, driven by increasing demand, while simultaneously, spiritual narratives often serve as mere "attachments" to strengthen brand image (Misshuari & Rodiah, 2023).

Efforts to dissect this shift in meaning have been numerous. Studies by Nurdianik et al (2022) and Widyanita et al (2022) sharply portray how capitalist economic motives have desacralized the hijab. Both find that in public spaces, the hijab has transformed from a marker of piety into a marker of social class and a lifestyle saturated with digital narcissism (Hanik et al., 2022). However, these studies tend to stop at sociological-phenomenological diagnoses without offering theological solutions to reconstruct the meaning of the hijab post-commodification. Consequently, an epistemological vacuum occurs (Misshuari & Rodiah, 2023): we know the hijab has become a commodity, but we lose the ethical foundation to define "decent dress" outside of rigid traditional *fiqh* definitions (Zain et al., 2023). This vacuum creates practical confusion, especially for the younger generation of Muslims who wish to remain fashionable without losing the religious essence of their attire.

While studies on hijab commodification have revealed the logic of lifestyle capitalism that turns the hijab into a marker of class and popular trends, most of these researches stop at the level of social-descriptive critique. Nurdianik et al. and Widyanita et al., for instance, succeeded in showing the transformation of the hijab into an instrument for self-image and social status formation, but have not offered normative tools that can serve as ethical references for Muslim women when negotiating with market forces. This vacuum gives birth to practical confusion: on one hand, there is pressure to follow the *"syar'i"* mode offered by the industry; on the other hand, there is theological anxiety because standards of piety seem increasingly determined by the visuality of clothing. Contemporary Muslim women are in a difficult position: accused of being unreligious if they do not wear the hijab according to certain standards, yet criticized for following trends if they appear in modern styles (Abdullah & Dar, 2025). There is no adequate space for dialogue to negotiate religious identity with the aesthetic demands of the era.

To fill this void, the thoughts of Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud offer fundamental theoretical foundations, though they are often studied separately. These two thinkers, despite different backgrounds and methodologies, both strive to return interpretive authority to the principles of justice and equality the core of Islamic teachings. Research by Meliasari (2024) highlights how Mernissi uses a socio-historical approach to dismantle patriarchal bias in the obligation of the hijab. Mernissi asserts that the hijab verse (Q.S. al-Ahzāb: 53) and the intervention of Umar bin Khattab were responses to a specific socio-political situation in Medina namely, protection from physical harassment rather than a universal command to sequester the female body. Mernissi brilliantly shows how male political interests helped shape religious interpretations that were subsequently deemed sacred and inviolable. She invites us to read history clearly, distinguishing between universal teachings and contextual responses to specific social problems.

Meanwhile, research by Mulyani (2024) explores Amina Wadud's tawhidic hermeneutics, which rejects the atomization of verses. For Wadud, the essence of Qur'anic teaching lies not in a piece of head-covering fabric, but in *"libās al-taqwā"* (the raiment of righteousness) and moral integrity. Wadud emphasizes that modesty is an internal attitude and egalitarian public behavior, not mere physical coverage which often fails to guarantee protection. Furthermore, Wadud develops an interpretive methodology that considers the entirety of the Qur'anic message on justice, rather than isolated verse fragments taken out of context. This approach allows us to see

the hijab not as an isolated obligation, but as part of a broader ethical system regarding how humans, particularly women, should be treated with respect and dignity.

Unfortunately, existing literature tends to position the thoughts of these two figures monographically or merely as a critique of orthodoxy, without synthesizing them to build a new ethical concept. Yet, upon closer inspection, there is a potential convergence between Mernissi's historical critique and Wadud's substantive hermeneutics. Both depart from a concern over the oppression of women in the name of religion, and both seek to restore the fundamental Qur'anic message of justice. Their different approaches serve as a richness that can be synthesized into a more robust theoretical framework. This article fills that gap by conducting a comparative dialectic between Mernissi's historical critique and Wadud's substantive hermeneutics.

The novelty of this research lies in its effort to formulate the concept of "contextual ethics of decency." The primary argument is: if Mernissi proves that the form of clothing is a historical product (contextual), and Wadud proves that the content of clothing is moral integrity (ethics), then the synthesis of both gives birth to a new definition of the hijab. The hijab is no longer about the standardization of fabric, but about the principles of decency that are adaptive to space and time (Rosmita et al., 2023). This concept not only addresses theological anxiety but also provides practical guidance for Muslim women in facing modern challenges. It acknowledges that clothing forms may change according to cultural developments, while maintaining an unchanging ethical core: that clothing must dignify the wearer, not degrade or objectify them.

Thus, the objective of this research is to reconstruct the understanding of the hijab from a "legal-formal obligation" to a "contextual ethics of decency." Through this synthesis, it is hoped that a perspective of Islamic law will emerge that is not only gender-responsive and historically accurate but also capable of addressing the challenges of the commodification era where piety is no longer measured by what is worn, but by how one presents oneself with dignity in the public sphere. This research is also expected to contribute to the development of contemporary Islamic studies, particularly in the fields of tafsir, fiqh, and gender studies, by offering a more contextual and substantive methodological alternative.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research method, as the primary focus is to examine the construction of thought and the interpretation of religious texts regarding the hijab sourced from literary data. The research design is descriptive-analytical with a comparative style, aiming to compare the perspectives of two Muslim feminist figures, Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud, in responding to the hijab phenomenon. A comparative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to clearly see fundamental similarities and differences in the two figures' frameworks, while identifying potential synthesis between them. This method also facilitates critical dialogue between different thoughts, resulting in a richer and more nuanced understanding.

Data sources in this study are divided into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary data sources consist of journal articles related to this research and the main works of the two figures. For Fatima Mernissi, the primary reference is *"The Veil and The Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam"* (1991), a monumental work that deeply explores the

patriarchal interpretive construction of the hijab verses. For Amina Wadud, the core work is *"Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective"* (1999), which offers a tawhidic hermeneutic methodology in reading the Qur'an. These two works form the primary foundation for understanding each figure's framework.

Secondary data sources include books, undergraduate and graduate theses, and previous research results relevant to the topics of hijab commodification, modest fashion trends, and critical studies of the two figures' thoughts. These secondary literatures serve to enrich the analysis, provide broader context, and ensure this research builds upon existing findings rather than repeating them. Criteria for selecting secondary sources include relevance to the topic, academic credibility, and recency of publication to ensure this research is based on the latest discourse developments.

Primary source selection criteria focused on works directly discussing the hijab, women's rights, and Qur'anic interpretive methodology from Mernissi and Wadud's perspectives. Regarding Mernissi, focus was directed toward works elaborating the historical meaning of the *hijab* verses and their relation to patriarchal power structures. Special attention was given to Mernissi's analysis of Umar bin Khattab's role in prompting the revelation of the jilbab verse, and how that verse was subsequently interpreted tendentiously by later generations. Regarding Wadud, attention was given to texts explaining the tawhidic hermeneutic framework, the concept of khalifah, and the emphasis on *libās al-taqwā* as the core of clothing teachings. Wadud does not merely discuss hijab verses in isolation but consistently links them to broader Qur'anic themes such as justice, equality, and individual moral responsibility.

Data collection was conducted through documentation, specifically by inventorying, deep reading, and classifying textual data regarding the genealogy of hijab law, historical critique, and the interpretation of jilbab verses. The collected data were then selected based on relevance and contribution to the research problem concerning the tension between dogma and lifestyle. Data analysis was conducted in stages: *First,* a close reading of key texts was performed to identify important categories such as the meaning of hijab, aurat, private-public, and security. *Second,* each category was traced to its historical origins and textual foundations to clarify contextual versus principled aspects. *Third,* a systematic comparison was made between how Mernissi and Wadud read the same verses or adjacent issues to find patterns of intersection and fundamental differences. *Fourth,* a theoretical synthesis was performed to formulate the concept of "contextual ethics of decency" as an answer to the desacralization of the *hijab* in the commodification era, before drawing final conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Market Hegemony and the Shift in Hijab Meaning: From Piety to Lifestyle

The dynamics of the hijab in contemporary Muslim society show a fundamental shift from a theological dimension to a socio-economic one (Merlins, 2024). Referring to the early historical review of Islam, the hijab functioned as an instrument of protection (*hifẓ*) and distinguishing identity (*tamyīz*) (Muslim & Rahma, 2024). At that time, the hijab had a very concrete and measurable function: protecting women from physical harassment in public spaces, particularly at

night when security was not guaranteed. Furthermore, the hijab served as a social status marker, distinguishing free women from slaves so they were treated with the respect due to their status. However, empirical reality reveals a transformation of these functions toward an aesthetic realm controlled by the market (Rahim et al., 2024). The protective function that was once the main reason for the existence of the hijab has now been almost forgotten, replaced by decorative and prestige functions determined by global fashion trends.

Referring to the findings of Nurdianik et al (2022), a process of desacralization of religious symbols is occurring through the fashion industry mechanism. The hijab, positioned in classical *fiqh* literature as a sacred covering with strict rules regarding material, size, and wear, is now reconstructed as a commodity subject to the laws of supply and demand. The market no longer asks whether a hijab model aligns with *sharia* guidance, but whether it sells and appeals to consumers. Muslim fashion producers compete to create new models with various colors, materials, and accessories solely to attract buyers. In this process, the spiritual values originally attached to the hijab erode bit by bit, replaced by temporary aesthetic and commercial values.

The practice of hijab commodification is evident in how Muslim fashion brands blend religious narratives with modern marketing strategies. The label *"syar'i"* is frequently paired with terms like "premium," "limited edition," or "influencer series," subtly linking religious compliance with the ability to purchase specific products. On social media, marketing campaigns feature hijab-wearing influencers highlighting a luxury and perfectly coordinated visual aesthetic, while the spiritual dimension appears only as brief slogans in captions. These influencers sell not just products, but a lifestyle and self-image. Social media followers are encouraged to identify with these figures, such that buying the same product is seen as a way to achieve similar status and social recognition. In this context, piety becomes a massively produced and replicated image, resulting in what may be termed "piety branding," where faith is reduced to a consumable and performative style.

This phenomenon is exacerbated by social media algorithms that prioritize visual content to remain fresh and engaging. Consequently, there is an extraordinary acceleration of trends in the Muslim fashion world. A hijab model popular this month can quickly be abandoned next month because it is considered outdated. Muslim women, especially the younger generation, are pressured to constantly follow these changes to avoid being deemed old-fashioned or uncool. This pressure creates a never-ending consumption cycle, where hijabs are purchased and replaced not because they are damaged or unwearable, but because the model is no longer "in." This consumptive behavior clearly contradicts Islamic teachings emphasizing simplicity and avoiding waste (*isrāf*).

The hijrah narrative is often co-opted by capitalism to create new markets, where the hijab is no longer interpreted purely as a form of transcendental obedience to God, but is mixed with a desire for social status (Karakavak & Özbölük, 2023). This phenomenon creates a paradox of "visual piety," where one appears pious outwardly through the quantity of fabric worn, but is trapped in consumptive behavior that contradicts the principle of simplicity (*zuhud*) in Islam (Hendra et al., 2025).

These findings are reinforced by Widyanita et al (2022), who highlight millennial behavior. For this demographic, the hijab has shifted function to become an instrument of social conformity within social circles. There is an implicit psychological pressure that being a "good Muslimah" is

synonymous with following current fashion trends. As a result, the hijab's function as a privacy protector is often ignored, replaced by its role as a means to attract attention in the digital space. In this context, the value of *"syar'i"* is no longer measured by internal piety but by aesthetic standards set by influencers and the fashion industry (Poulis et al., 2025). This tension between spirituality and materialism demands a re-reading of religious texts: whether Islam mandates specific clothing models rigidly or only mandates its moral values (Izzatunnisa & Kudhori, 2025). This question is answered through a deep analysis of Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud's thoughts.

Fatima Mernissi's Historical Critique: Hijab as a Political-Patriarchal Construction

Fatima Mernissi offers a socio-historical approach to dissect the validity of the hijab obligation, which is often regarded as static dogma. In her analysis, Mernissi does not reject the Qur'anic text but rejects the manipulation of interpretation by male elites to perpetuate power by ignoring historical context (George & Bano, 2023).

For Mernissi, readings of the hijab that emphasize total covering of the female body cannot be separated from the political projects of Muslim men seeking to control women's mobility. By interpreting the hijab as a universal, ahistorical obligation, male religious authorities succeeded in shifting focus from a critique of unjust social structures to the regulation of the female body itself. Overemphasis on clothing has obscured substantive issues such as violence, access to education, and political participation. Within this framework, the hijab is not just a tool of piety but also an instrument of social discipline directing women toward the domestic sphere and away from the public. Mernissi's primary analysis focuses on the asbabun nuzul of Surah Al-Ahzab [33] verse 53:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ اٰمَنُوْا لَا تَدْخُلُوْا بُيُوْتَ النَّبِيِّ اِلَّآ اَنْ يُّؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ اِلٰى طَعَامٍ غَيْرَ نٰظِرِيْنَ اِنٰىهُ وَلٰكِنْ اِذَا دُعِيْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوْا فَاِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوْا وَلَا مُسْتَأْنِسِيْنَ لِحَدِيْثٍۗ اِنَّ ذٰلِكُمْ كَانَ يُؤْذِى النَّبِيَّ فَيَسْتَحْيٖ مِنْكُمْۖ وَاللّٰهُ لَا يَسْتَحْيٖ مِنَ الْحَقِّۗ وَاِذَا سَاَلْتُمُوْهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَسْـَٔلُوْهُنَّ مِنْ وَّرَاۤءِ حِجَابٍۗ ذٰلِكُمْ اَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوْبِكُمْ وَقُلُوْبِهِنَّۗ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ اَنْ تُؤْذُوْا رَسُوْلَ اللّٰهِ وَلَآ اَنْ تَنْكِحُوْٓا اَزْوَاجَهٗ مِنْۢ بَعْدِهٖٓ اَبَدًاۗ اِنَّ ذٰلِكُمْ كَانَ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ عَظِيْمًا

"O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that (behavior) was troubling the Prophet, and he is shy of (dismissing) you. But Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask (his wives) for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not (conceivable or lawful) for you to harm the Messenger of Allah or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of Allah an enormity."

Mernissi argues that the word *"hijab"* in this verse literally means a curtain or spatial partition, not clothing worn on the body. This verse was revealed in the specific context of the Prophet's marriage to Zainab binti Jahsh, where several male guests lingered in the narrow wedding chamber. The revelation of this verse was intended to establish visitation ethics and separate the Prophet's private space from the public, not to universally regulate women's clothing. Mernissi asserts that making this verse a basis for the obligation of covering the head for all Muslim women is an ahistorical logical leap that ignores the specific context of the Prophet's privacy (Mernissi, 1991).

Furthermore, Mernissi's analysis highlights the intervention of Umar bin Khattab in the hijab obligation via Surah Al-Ahzab [33] verse 59:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّبِيُّ قُل لِّأَزْوَٰجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَآءِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِن جَلَٰبِيبِهِنَّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰٓ أَن يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا

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

Historical facts show that in Medina at that time, sexual harassment often occurred in public spaces at night. Perpetrators often excused themselves by claiming they thought the harassed woman was a slave, who lacked equal legal protection to free women. Umar bin Khattab urged the Prophet to have his wives and believing women distinguish themselves from slaves through clothing. Mernissi concludes that the *illat* (legal reason) or logical basis of this command was security and social class distinction (Rohman et al., 2024). At that time, the hijab functioned as a visual identification tool so free women would be recognized and not harassed. Therefore, for Mernissi, if the primary reasons were physical security and social status distinction which are now irrelevant due to state legal guarantees and the abolition of slavery then mandating the same form of clothing in the modern era is a form of freezing history. What should be maintained is the ethical spirit of protection, not the formal shape of the fabric.

Amina Wadud's Tawhidic Hermeneutics: Substance over Symbol

Unlike Mernissi's historical approach, Amina Wadud utilizes a tawhidic hermeneutic centered on textual analysis to reject atomistic readings that marginalize women (Rozy, 2023). Wadud proposes the thesis that the Qur'an never established a single fixed form of dress but offered inclusive principles of modesty. She refers to Surah Al-A'rāf [7] verse 26 as the philosophical foundation of clothing in Islam:

يَٰبَنِىٓ ءَادَمَ قَدْ أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُوَٰرِي سَوْءَٰتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا ۖ وَلِبَاسُ ٱلتَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ

"O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness - that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember."

Through this verse, Wadud finds a hierarchy of values in dress. The Qur'an acknowledges the function of clothing as covering the aurat and as adornment or aesthetics, which implicitly legitimizes the fashion aspect. However, the Qur'an immediately asserts that "the raiment of righteousness" (*libas at-taqwa*) is the highest level. Wadud sharply criticizes views that reduce female piety to a piece of head-cloth. For Wadud, if a woman wears a long jilbab but lacks moral integrity, honesty, and social justice, she has not yet worn the raiment of righteousness. Modesty is an internal attitude reflected in egalitarian public behavior, not just physical coverage. Wadud emphasizes the moral autonomy of women as full agents (*khalifah*) before God, where clothing choices must arise from personal spiritual awareness (*qana'ah*), not state coercion or social pressure to follow market trends (Wadud, 1999).

The tawhidic hermeneutic framework developed by Amina Wadud rests on the principle that God's oneness must be reflected in relations of equality and justice among humans. Any

interpretation resulting in the permanent subordination of one gender contradicts the principle of tawhid, as it implicitly places men as absolute authorities over women. Therefore, Wadud rejects readings of hijab and aurat verses that objectify women as targets of control, placing them instead as moral subjects directly responsible to Allah.

Towards Contextual Ethics of Decency: A Theoretical Synthesis

The convergence of Fatima Mernissi's historical critique and Amina Wadud's tawhidic hermeneutics gives birth to a new theoretical synthesis called the contextual ethics of decency. This concept emerges as a response to the phenomenon of hijab commodification that shallowly interprets spiritual meaning, while serving as a way out of the intellectual deadlock that has rigidly pitted strict formalism against loose liberalism. The contextual ethics of decency is built upon the synergy of deconstructing form and reconstructing substance (Fidhayanti et al., 2024), a dialectic that brings together Mernissi's thesis and Wadud's anti-thesis into a more comprehensive new synthesis.

From Mernissi's perspective, it is understood that the hijab is a cultural product responding to a specific social situation; thus, clothing forms may change according to local cultural contexts and the era, provided the primary function is achieved. Mernissi teaches us not to absolutize temporary historical forms. Muslims are not required to mimic 7th-century Arab culture to be pious. What is termed "Islamic clothing" does not always have to be loose robes and wide veils in the Middle Eastern style. Every culture has its own forms of decent dress that can be adapted as long as they meet Islamic ethical principles. A Muslimah in Indonesia may wear a modified kebaya with a hijab covering the chest, just as a Muslimah in Africa may wear her traditional attire, provided the principles of covering the aurat and not displaying ornaments excessively are fulfilled.

From Wadud's perspective, it is understood that the substance of clothing is piety (*taqwa*); thus, the limit to following fashion trends is when those trends violate the principles of moral decency. Wadud reminds us that what matters most is not the outer form, but the inner quality that motivates one to dress. If a person wears the hijab out of sincere spiritual awareness, she will maintain behavior consistent with Islamic values not just in dress but in all aspects of life. Conversely, if the hijab is merely a fashion trend without spiritual awareness, it loses its essence as worship. Wadud also emphasizes that clothing, in any form, must dignify the wearer, not degrade or turn them into a sexual object. This principle serves as an essential filter in assessing fashion trends: does a clothing model present a woman as a dignified subject, or does it turn her into an object exploited for commercial interests?

This synthesis asserts that the hijab is not the end goal (*gayah*) but a means (*wasilah*) to achieve piety. In this perspective, the "lifestyle hijab" phenomenon is not inherently wrong; it becomes problematic when the fashion aspect erases the modesty aspect. As long as a woman maintains the essence of decency, she is free to express herself through clothing according to her taste and cultural context. There is no sin in following fashion trends as long as they do not contradict fundamental Islamic values such as covering the aurat, avoiding of excessive luxury (*tabarruj*), and not imitating the opposite sex. The problem arises when women feel forced to follow certain trends due to social pressure, or when they use the hijab specifically to attract attention and flaunt luxury.

Contextual ethics of decency demands that clothing, in any form, must function to dignify the subject rather than turning them into a market spectacle or a symbol of excessive luxury (*tabarruj*). The parameters of decency are no longer measured by conformity to a specific model labeled as "*syar'i*," but by the extent to which the attire fulfills the function of protection, avoids creating social discord (*fitnah*), and reflects the wearer's dignity. Within this framework, a long hijab made of luxurious materials and conspicuous accessories is not necessarily superior to a simple hijab with modest clothing, especially if the former serves only to attract attention or foster excessive pride.

This theory provides space for women to exercise agency in defining their identity within the market era, liberating them from theological guilt for not wearing a specific clothing model, while simultaneously guarding them against the pitfalls of consumerist narcissism. Women need not feel sinful for choosing contemporary hijab styles as long as the essence of modesty is maintained. Conversely, they should not feel more pious simply because they wear a specific model perceived as more "*syar'i*." The measure of piety shifts from symbolic formalism toward dignified public ethics; from outward appearance to inner quality and social behavior.

The practical implications of this concept are extensive. In religious education, for instance, the focus of teaching should no longer be on the standardization of clothing forms, but on instilling adaptive values of decency. Girls should be taught to understand the principles of dress in Islam rather than being fed a long list of "dos and don'ts" that are often decontextualized. They must be given the space to discuss and inquire, ensuring that the awareness of dress grows from within rather than through external coercion. In a family context, parents need not panic if their children choose a hijab style different from previous generations, provided the core principles remain intact. Socially, the community is expected to be more tolerant of diversity in dress and less prone to judging others based solely on their choices.

Contextual ethics of decency also provides theological legitimacy for modest fashion as a valid expression of identity, provided that such expression is rooted in moral integrity and avoids self-objectification. The modest fashion industry can continue to thrive without guilt, as long as it upholds ethical values in production and marketing. Muslim designers are encouraged to create clothing models that are modest yet appealing, catering to contemporary market tastes. Hijab influencers are reminded to focus not only on visual aspects but also to convey profound moral messages. Thus, the hijab is no longer a battlefield between dogma and lifestyle, but a productive space for dialogue between spirituality and creativity.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the tension between theological dogma and lifestyle reality in the contemporary hijab phenomenon cannot be resolved through a formalistic fiqh approach alone. Instead, it demands a philosophical reconstruction, formulated in this study as "contextual ethics of decency." Through a critical synthesis of Fatima Mernissi's historical deconstruction and Amina Wadud's tawhidic hermeneutics, this study asserts that the hijab is not a static end goal *(ghayah)* but a dynamic cultural medium *(wasilah)*. The primary finding indicates that the desacralization of religious symbols by the market need not be met with anti-modernity rejection, but rather by strengthening the substance of *libās al-taqwā.*

The concept of "contextual ethics of decency" advances current scholarship by offering a new theoretical foundation that legitimizes modest fashion as a valid expression of identity, as long as it is rooted in moral integrity and avoids self-objectification. Consequently, this study provides a scientific justification for the agency of Muslim women to negotiate with global trends without losing their spiritual essence, shifting the parameters of piety from visual uniformity to the quality of public ethics.

As a practical implication, these findings suggest a necessary reorientation in religious education, moving away from the standardization of clothing forms toward instilling adaptive values of decency. However, as this research is limited to textual analysis and theoretical thought, its primary limitation lies in the absence of empirical verification regarding how this ethical concept is practiced at the grassroots level. Therefore, further research is highly recommended to examine the sociological reception of urban Muslim communities toward this "contextual ethics of decency" through ethnographic approaches. The pressing open question for future studies is: to what extent can women's agency withstand the fashion industry's algorithms that continue to dictate the definition of piety *(saleh)*, and what new forms of negotiation between spiritual values and materialism will emerge in the future?

DECLARATION OF USING AI

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Gemini in order to improve language, grammar, and overall readability. After using this tool, the authors thoroughly reviewed, critically evaluated, and edited the output to ensure accuracy. The authors confirms that all core arguments, theoretical syntheses, and original insights presented in this manuscript were developed solely by the authors. The authors takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

REFERENCES

Dhiah Indriani, L. (2023). Trajectory Konstruksi Jilbab di Indonesia: Pertarungan Beragam Kepentingan. *Jurnal Mahasiswa Komunikasi Cantrik*, *3*(1). https://doi.org/10.20885/cantrik.vol3.iss1.art1

Fidhayanti, D., Muhammad, M., Aunur Rofiq, M., Fuadi, M. R., Hakim, A., & Bil Makkiy, N. C. (2024). Rethinking Islamic Feminist Thought on Reinterpreting the Qur'an: An Analysis of the Thoughts of Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan. *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman*, *35*(1), 37–56. https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v35i1.4956

Fitriana Maghdalena, & Zulkiply Lessy. (2024). Menafsir Ulang Hijab: Dinamika dan Makna Dalam Konteks Global. *RISOMA : Jurnal Riset Sosial Humaniora Dan Pendidikan*, *2*(2), 84–95. https://doi.org/10.62383/risoma.v2i2.72

George, D. V., & Bano, A. (2023). Understanding the Misinterpretations in Qurrsquo;Anic Hermeneutics Through Fatima Mernissirsquo;S the Veil and the Male Elite. *International Journal of Research in English*, *5*(1), 178–180. https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2023.v5.i1c.99

Hanik, U., Zahid, A., & Sholikhah, R. A. (2022). Commodification of Religious Symbols Through The Practice of Islamic Lifestyle on Hijabers in Kediri. *SANGKéP: Jurnal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan*, *5*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.20414/sangkep.v5i1.5531

Hendra, H., Aepu, S. H. N., Kumbayoni, I., & Anjarsari, H. (2025). Jilbab: The Interplay of Ideology, Dress Code, and Consumerism. *SIGn Journal of Social Science*, *5*(2), 78–96. https://doi.org/10.37276/sjss.v5i2.415

Karakavak, Z., & Özbölük, T. (2023). When Modesty Meets Fashion: How Social Media and Influencers Change the Meaning of Hijab. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, *14*(11), 2907–2927. https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-05-2021-0152

Meliasari, S. A. (2024). *Pemikiran Fatima Mernissi Mengenai Hijab dan Kesalehan* [Skripsi, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta]. https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/

Merlins, R. R. (2024). The Hijab Transformed: A Shifting Social Identity in Bauman's Liquid Modernity. *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, *19*(1), 47–72. https://doi.org/10.14421/ckhdtn58

Mernissi, F. (1991). *The Veil and The Male Elite : A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Perseus Books.

Misshuari, D. H., & Rodiah, I. (2023). Hijab pada Budaya Populer: Antara Spiritualitas dan Konsumerisme. *Purwadita : Jurnal Agama Dan Budaya*, *7*(2), 126. https://doi.org/10.55115/purwadita.v7i2.3123

Mulyani, I. F. (2024). *Pandangan Amina Wadud Tentang Jilbab* [Skripsi, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta]. https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/

Muslim, M. A., & Rahma, A. A. (2024). Kaidah 'Am dalam al-Qur'an: Kajian terhadap Surat al-Ahzab Ayat 59 Serta Implikasinya terhadap Ketentuan Berhijab bagi Perempuan Muslim. *Studia Qur'anika*, *9*(1), 133–154. https://doi.org/10.21111/studiQur'an.v9i1.12310

Nurdianik, Y., Attas, S. G., & Anwar, M. K. (2022). Hijab: Antara Tren dan Syariat di Era Kontemporer (Hijab: Between Trend and Sharia in the Contemporary Era). *Indonesian Journal of Social Science Review*, *1*(1), 11–20. https://doi.org/10.21831/jis.v2i1.4

Poulis, A., Farache, F., Elbayouk, O., & Nikas, I. A. (2025). Branding Muslim hijabi fashion: exploring influencer trends and impact. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *30*(5), 867–887. https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-02-2024-0024

Rahim, A., Halimatuzzahro, H., & Rahimah, B. N. (2024). Antara Kesalihan dan Gaya Hidup: Hijab Syar'i dalam Pusaran Praktik Komodifikasi Industri Budaya Islami pada Mahasiswi di Kota Mataram. *TATHWIR: Jurnal Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam*, *15*(2), 152–172. https://doi.org/10.15548/jt.v15i2.10201

Ramadana, R. (2022). Hadis Hijab Pandangan Kontemporer: Studi terhadap Pemahaman Fatima Mernissi, Quraish Shihab, dan Muhammad Syahrur. *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Ushuluddin*, *2*(1), 86–112. https://doi.org/10.15575/jpiu.13562

Razia Abdullah, & Showkat Hussain Dar. (2025). Hijāb, Choice, and Identity: Between Feminist Liberation and Islamic Modesty. *LECTURES: Journal of Islamic and Education Studies*, *4*(3), 443–460. https://doi.org/10.58355/lectures.v4i3.177

Rohman, A., Muttaqien, G. A., ALMonawer, F. H., Rumanian, T., & Deik, M. (2024). Challenging The Interpretation of The Verse on Hijab By M. Quraish Shihab: A Critical Analysis Review. *QiST: Journal of Qur'an and Tafseer Studies*, *3*(2), 192–215. https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v3i2.4046

Rosmita, R., Qadriani Arifuddin, Sitti Aminah, & Nasaruddin, N. (2023). Eksistensi Hijab sebagai Upaya Perlindungan terhadap Wanita Muslimah Perspektif Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah. *BUSTANUL FUQAHA: Jurnal Bidang Hukum Islam*, *4*(1), 22–39.

https://doi.org/10.36701/bustanul.v4i1.882

Rozy, Y. F. (2023). The Hermeneutics Influence on Feminist Exegesis: A Case Study on Amina Wadud. *QiST: Journal of Qur'an and Tafseer Studies*, *2*(3), 369–381. https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v2i3.2908

Setiawan, A., Sunjayadi, A., Ramlan, Y., & Alatas, A. (2024). From Alienation to Industrialization: Hijab Activism and the Transformation of Indonesian Urban Society from Late 1970s until Today. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, *19*(2), 155–168. https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol19no2.11

Siti Yulinda Nurhalimah, Muhammad Alif, & Repa Hudan Lisalam. (2025). Penerapan Hadis Tematik tentang Berpakaian Islami dalam Budaya Fashion Muslim Modern. *Ikhlas : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Islam*, *2*(3), 261–270. https://doi.org/10.61132/ikhlas.v2i3.1145

Syakhna Izzatunnisa, & Muhammad Kudhori. (2025). Hijab Behind the Scenes: Analysis of Qur'anic Interpretation in Traditional Arab Clothing. *Al-Fahmu: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir*, *4*(2), 601–612. https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v4i2.615

Umi Waqhidah, & Annias Suci Pratamia. (2025). Hijab dalam Sorotan Tafsir Kontemporer: Antara Kewajiban Religius dan Tuntutan Sosial. *Journal Central Publisher*, *2*(7), 2283–2290. https://doi.org/10.60145/jcp.v2i7.478

Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman : Rereading The Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press.

Widyanita, A. R., Najmah Shabrina, S. R., & Sadewo, F. X. S. (2022). Analisis Trend Fashion Hijab dalam Kajian Budaya Populer di Kalangan Generasi Milenial. *Majalah Ilmiah Tabuah: Ta`limat, Budaya, Agama Dan Humaniora*, *26*(2), 73–79. https://doi.org/10.37108/tabuah.v26i2.734

Zain, M., Aaisyah, S., Alimuddin, A., Abdillah, A. M., & Fauzi, M. F. B. (2023). Hijab Discourse in Indonesia: The Battle of Meaning Between Sharia and Culture in Public Space. *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, *7*(3), 1661. https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i3.19383