



The Command of *Jilbāb* in the Quran: Between Symbols of Piety and the Issue of Women's Exclusivity in Public Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the fact that several cases have been found where veiled women experience marginalization both in society due to their style of veiling (*niqab*) and in the workplace. This is certainly contrary to the intent of the Qur'anic verse prescribing veiling, which is meant to protect women. Therefore, this study aims to re-examine the Qur'anic verses that discuss *jilbāb* by considering the inclusive space for women in the public sphere. This research uses a phenomenological approach, intertextual method, and Margot Badran's Islamic feminism theory. This study finds that the interpretation of the *jilbāb* verse shows a trend that the essence of the *jilbāb* is to protect the dignity and honor of women, with various interpretations of its form. Some interpret *jilbāb* as a cloth covering the head of a woman, while others see it as modest clothing. Initially, the protection prescribed by the *jilbāb* was understood internally as a command to cover the 'awrah. However, as cases of marginalization against veiled women have emerged, the *jilbāb* can now be understood not only as protection through covering the 'awrah but also as protection of women's rights legally and socially. Therefore, this study does not justify the marginalization of veiled women for any reason.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Jilbāb; Interpretation of the Qur'an; Women's Rights; Inclusive Space

Article History:

Received: December 10, 2023

Revised: July 11, 2024

Accepted: July 27, 2024


Published: July 31, 2024


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Introduction

The use of the *jilbāb* by women in Indonesia today is actually a relatively recent phenomenon. Looking back to the New Order era, it can be noted that the *jilbāb* was not yet a common Muslim attire worn in public areas. This was not only due to the less fervent religious expression among Indonesian Muslim women at that time compared to today, but also due to government policies prohibiting the use of the *jilbāb* in public areas (Nuraeni & Gumilar, 2021; Pujiati, 2023; Yulikhah, 2017). The widespread adoption of the *jilbāb* in Indonesia today not only signifies a trend in Muslim women's attire, but on a more discursive level, it is often viewed as a symbol of femininity and Islamic piety. Moreover, the style of the *jilbāb* often indicates the social status of a woman (Wildan & Witriani, 2021).. Regarding the contemporary meaning of the *jilbāb*, Karen E. Washburn suggests

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 <https://doi.org/10.22515/bg.v9i1.8359>

that socially, it can carry at least three forms of meaning: as a symbol of identification that a woman is Muslim, as a personal symbol that may not hold specific meaning but can provoke discriminatory actions in certain contexts, and as a symbol of personal transformation towards improvement (Budiastuti, 2012; Eviandaru, 2011).

The *jilbāb* indeed becomes an intriguing issue, especially in contemporary contexts where it carries numerous meanings, not just religious but also socio-cultural (Brown, 2019; Marinda, 2019; Safri, 2014; Sunesti, 2014; Yulikhah, 2017). This issue's significance is evident in Islamic religious discourse, where explicitly in the Qur'an there are verses commanding Muslim women to extend their *jilbāb*. Within Islamic discourse, the *jilbāb* is a debated issue because of the multitude of opinions surrounding it; these differences not only discuss whether it is obligatory for women to wear the *jilbāb* but also debate its very form. Indeed, factors of religious interpretation and cultural influence underlie these differences (Daud, 2013; Najitama, 2014; Suhendra, 2016; Zain dkk., 2023). These differences in interpretation of the *jilbāb* in the Qur'an cannot be divorced from the understanding of Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59. This verse explicitly instructs Prophet Muhammad to call upon the believing women, especially his wives and daughters, to extend their *jilbābs*. The directive in this verse aims to ensure that the believing women are recognized and not harassed by mischievous men. Muhammad Quraish Shihab outlines that broadly, there are two distinct groups in their approach to this verse (Shihab, 2018; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020; Wartini, 2014).

Most scholars hold the view that the wearing of the *jilbāb* applies not only during the time of Prophet Muhammad, even though the verse was revealed due to specific circumstances of that era. Therefore, the *jilbāb* in today's time is also obligatory for Muslim women. However, some contemporary scholars argue that the verse only applied during the time of Prophet Muhammad, particularly when slavery was prevalent, and the *jilbāb* served to distinguish between slave women and free women. Its purpose was to protect free women from harassment, especially by hypocritical men in Medina. Thus, this second view does not mandate Muslim women to wear the *jilbāb* in current times (Shihab, 2018; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020; Wartini, 2014). Based on this dichotomy of opinions, both the first and second groups actually acknowledge that Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59, was revealed in relation to efforts to protect women from social disturbances caused by mischievous men, particularly in the form of harassment and sexual violence prevalent at that time. The difference between these two opinions lies mainly in their approach, where the first opinion tends to adhere to the textual meaning, while the second opinion tends to focus on the substantive meaning of the verse.

Regardless of the differences in interpretations regarding the form of the *jilbāb*, it is a fact that today some Muslim women experience discrimination either due to the style of their *jilbāb* or as a result of their job requirements. For example, the use of the niqab; in Indonesia, the use of the niqab remains a topic frequently debated among Muslims to this day. Indonesian society itself views women wearing the niqab with controversy, as many consider it incompatible with Islamic law and see it as adopting Middle Eastern culture, such as that of Arab countries. Moreover, a woman wearing the niqab in Indonesia faces negative stigma, being seen as an initial representation of radicalism and terrorism in society (Adam, 2023; Rahayu dkk., 2023). Certainly, such stigma cannot be justified, as regardless, the niqab represents one interpretation of the Qur'anic text, and therefore, it has its own validity (Mujahidin, 2019; Sarpika dkk., 2023; Syekh, 2019).

In addition to societal contexts, discrimination against women wearing the *jilbāb* also occurs in the workplace. Many companies do not allow their female employees to wear the *jilbāb* while working. This is often reinforced by company regulations, with reasons for the prohibition typically based on the belief that wearing the *jilbāb* might hinder performance at work (Malabar dkk., 2022). Cases like these clearly violate the religious expression rights of Muslim women and are unjustifiable. Moreover, there are instances where Muslim women are prohibited from wearing the *jilbāb* because their company's leadership is non-Muslim, and wearing the *jilbāb* is seen as highlighting

specific religious symbols (Sari, 2014; Umar, 2018). Such actions also infringe upon women's rights to express their religious beliefs. These examples represent forms of discriminatory practices in both social and work environments, restricted by established rules. This issue is a problem that cannot be ignored, as the right to express one's religion is a fundamental right that should be upheld by every citizen (Putra, 2023).

Based on the facts above, this research considers it necessary to re-examine the Quranic verses concerning the *jilbāb* while paying attention to the inclusive space for women in the public sphere. This study poses two questions: (1) How is the interpretation of the *jilbāb* verse in the Qur'an?; (2) How should the *jilbāb* verse in the Qur'an be reinterpreted, taking into account the inclusive space for women in the public sphere?

Literature Review

Research examining the *jilbāb* in the Qur'an is abundant, including studies such as Atik Wartini's investigation into Muhammad Quraish Shihab's reasoning on the issue of *jilbāb* (Wartini, 2014); Yuyun Sunesti's research on *jilbāb* and the Indonesian context, which seeks to negotiate the portrayal of women wearing *jilbāb* in public spaces (Sunesti, 2014); Arif Nuh Safri's study on the shifting meanings of *jilbāb* from a symbol of status to a symbol of piety (Safri, 2014); Ahmad Suhendra's research on the evolving meanings of hijab in the Qur'an (Suhendra, 2016); and Aizul Maula's research contextualizing the meaning of *jilbāb* using the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* method (Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). Based on the literature review conducted, this study shares a similar orientation with Aizul Maula's research, which contextualizes the verses on *jilbāb*, albeit using a different methodological approach, employing Islamic feminist theory rather than interpretive methods. Furthermore, this study focuses on facilitating dialogue between interpretations of the *jilbāb* verses in the Qur'an and issues of inclusive space for women in the public sphere. Unlike Maula's research, this study also aligns with Yuyun Sunesti's investigation into *jilbāb* in public spaces, although Sunesti's study does not address interpretations of the Qur'anic verses on *jilbāb* at all.

Method

To achieve its objectives, this research employs a phenomenological approach and Margot Badran's Islamic feminist theory. Phenomenology itself is useful for interpreting the meanings of social phenomena and their relationships with the surrounding environment in specific contexts. Phenomenology views its object of study as a whole entity that cannot be separated from other objects of study (Hadi dkk., 2021). In the context of this study, the highlighted phenomenon is the marginalization and discrimination against Muslim women wearing the *jilbāb* due to differences in religious expression and variations in *jilbāb* styles. Building upon this social phenomenon, the research then engages with the texts of the Qur'an and attempts to address this issue through the science of interpretation (tafsir). To uncover universal moral values and address existing issues, this study utilizes Margot Badran's Islamic feminist theory. For Badran, Islamic feminism is a discourse and practice within an Islamic paradigm that uses the Qur'an as a basis to seek understanding of rights and justice for both women and men. The foundational argument in Islamic feminism, according to Badran, is that the Qur'an articulates and advocates for gender justice and social justice. The methodology of Islamic feminism combines classical methods with approaches from anthropology and sociology. The justice advocated in Islamic feminism extends beyond the private sphere to encompass the public sphere (Badran, 2009).

The method used in this research is intertextual analysis. The word "intertext" combines "inter," meaning between, among, or amidst (KBBI Daring, 2024a), and "text," which has several meanings: original manuscripts by an author; quotations from sacred texts for foundational teachings or reasons; and written discourse (KBBI Daring, 2024b). When these two words are combined, intertext refers to the relationships woven between

one text and another (Kuswarini, 2017). Practically, the intertextual method in this study involves understanding the Qur'anic text alongside other texts, including Qur'anic verses, hadiths (Syamsuddin dkk., 2020), classical and contemporary exegeses, dictionaries, and supporting literature to achieve research objectives.

Result and Discussion

The Phenomenon of the Jilbāb: Initial Interpretations and Discriminatory Practices

When discussing the *jilbāb* in today's context, it is closely associated with the attire of a Muslim woman. However, if we refer to its history, we will find that the *jilbāb* was worn long before the advent of Islam, and the concept of the *jilbāb* was also known in pre-Islamic religions. For example, the Torah recognized a concept of clothing similar to the *jilbāb*, referred to as "tif'eret." Similarly, in the Bible, the concept of the *jilbāb* is mentioned as "zaif," "zammah," and "re'adah" (al-Asymawi, 2003; Yulikhah, 2017). Even further back, in the Assyrian legal texts, the *jilbāb* was known and used as a symbol of a certain social caste (Marinda, 2019; Safri, 2014). From this, it can be understood that the issue of the *jilbāb* is not a simple one, as the concept is very diverse and influenced by the time and culture surrounding each particular society. Even when brought into today's context, where the *jilbāb* has become synonymous with the clothing worn by women to cover their heads, it is often not accepted by certain cultural communities (Marinda, 2019; Safri, 2014; Yulikhah, 2017). Furthermore, in Indonesia, the *jilbāb* itself was once politicized and subsequently banned from public spaces (Alatas & Desliyanti, 2002; Nuraeni & Gumilar, 2021; Pujiati, 2023).

At least, the discriminatory phenomenon against Muslim women wearing the *jilbāb* has once captured international attention when the French government prohibited its citizens from displaying certain religious symbols in public spaces, particularly in schools. This led many Muslim girls at that time to lose the freedom to wear their *jilbāb* while attending school (Anjani dkk., 2022; Shihab, 2018). In Indonesia, the *jilbāb* was also politicized, specifically during the New Order era, around the 1980s, when a regulation was enforced that banned schoolgirls from wearing the *jilbāb* in their schools. This regulation was accommodated by Decree No. 052/C/Kep/D/82 of 1982, which regulated the form and use of uniforms in public schools. As a result, many female students received warnings from their schools, and some had to transfer to private schools that allowed the *jilbāb* because they adhered firmly to their beliefs (Alatas & Desliyanti, 2002; Nuraeni & Gumilar, 2021; Pujiati, 2023). The ban on schoolgirls wearing the *jilbāb* in public schools was later lifted by the New Order government due to widespread opposition from the public. However, from this case, it can be understood that the *jilbāb* issue extends beyond religious matters and into the realm of politics. In both issues, the most disadvantaged are the women wearing the *jilbāb* who are unable to express their religious identity.

Looking back, especially during the New Order era, not many women wore the *jilbāb*. Only Muslim women from rural areas wore it, and even then, it was limited to certain times and places. The *jilbāb* was worn during Eid al-Fitr, religious study sessions, or by women who had performed Hajj (Budiastuti, 2012). In stark contrast to the New Order era, today the *jilbāb* has become a fashion trend for most Muslim women in Indonesia, no longer confined to specific times and places. Theologically, women wearing the *jilbāb* can not only fulfill the religious commandments of their faith but also benefit positively. The *jilbāb* serves to protect women from temptations posed by men who might otherwise be attracted to them if they did not wear it and displayed their bodies. In other words, women who do not cover their bodies can be more susceptible to being tempted by men. Additionally, in today's context, the *jilbāb* has also become a commodity due to the trend, with many different styles emerging. This trend is among the positive external impacts of the widespread phenomenon of Muslim women wearing the *jilbāb*. However, the fashion trend of the *jilbāb* can sometimes have negative impacts if the designs do not

fulfill the primary function of the *jilbāb*, which is to meet standards of modesty and decency (Sunesti, 2014).

Although today in Indonesia the *jilbāb* has become a common piece of clothing, discriminatory practices against women who wear the *jilbāb* still occur, albeit rarely. For instance, when examining interpretations of the *jilbāb*'s form, one will find that the styles of the *jilbāb* vary widely. The problem arises when this diversity is not accompanied by an inclusive attitude from society, leading to discriminatory actions such as negative stigmas against women who wear certain styles of *jilbāb*, such as the niqab. This can be seen in the research by Galuh Putri Rahayu, et al., which mentions that in the Summersari area of Jember Regency, discriminatory treatment against women who choose to wear the niqab still occurs. Ironically, this affects several niqab-wearing women who are university students. The study shows that the motivation for women to wear the niqab is as a form of religious obedience and also to protect themselves from negative influences. Some niqab-wearing women report that they experience difficulties in interacting with the local community and often receive negative stigmas from society. This presents a significant challenge for niqab-wearing women in Indonesia, especially in areas around Jember Regency (Rahayu dkk., 2023).

Besides the impact of *jilbāb* models, discriminatory treatment towards women is also found in their workplaces. This can be seen in Rahmawan J. Umar's research at Stella Maris Hospital in Makassar City. Discriminatory actions against Muslim women wearing the *jilbāb* are evident at this hospital. Female employees who wear the *jilbāb* daily are forced to remove it while working because they know of the prohibition but choose not to resist it. Despite this, they continue to wear the *jilbāb* consistently outside of work. Their reasons for persisting include economic necessity and the lack of job opportunities, leading them to choose this employment despite having to remove their *jilbāb* (Umar, 2018). These two cases are just a few examples of the discriminatory incidents experienced by women wearing the *jilbāb* in various regions. Although these cases are micro in nature, they indicate that women wearing the *jilbāb* lack protection, despite the *jilbāb* itself being intended to safeguard women's rights. Moreover, it is also understood that temptations faced by women wearing the *jilbāb* today are not limited to sexist temptations alone, but also encompass social issues that tend to stigmatize women wearing the *jilbāb* in specific cases.

Interpretation of the Jilbāb Verse in the Quran from the Perspective of Classical and Modern Scholars

Before presenting the interpretations of Islamic thinkers on the verse concerning the prescription of the *jilbāb* found in Surah Al-Ahzab [33]: 59, the text and meaning of the verse are as follows:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

Translation: *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.*

Textually, this verse commands the Prophet Muhammad to instruct his wives and daughters to extend their *jilbāb*. This command applies not only to the family of the Prophet Muhammad but also to the wives of the believers. The word "*jilbāb*" in this verse uses the term "*jalābīb*," which is the plural form of "*jilbāb*." This term is specifically found only in Surah Al-Ahzab [33] verse 59. Linguistically, the word "*jilbāb*" has its root in "*jalābā*," which means "to bring" or "to bring forth." Additionally, it can mean "to cover something with something" (Daud, 2013; Sarpika dkk., 2023; Suhendra, 2016;

Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). In this context, "*jilbāb*" refers to a loose garment worn by women to cover their bodies. Ibn Manzur also mentions that "*jilbāb*" is a garment or cloth larger than "*al-khimar*" and without "*rida*" (a type of turban) that covers the head and chest. "*Jilbāb*" can also be described as a cloth without "*al-milhafah*" (a cloth used to wrap the head) worn by women, or it can even be referred to as "*al-milhafah*" itself (Ibn Manzūr, t.th.; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). Additionally, "*jilbāb*" can mean a cloth that covers the entire body of a woman (Daud, 2013; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020).

Indeed, when discussing the form of *jilbāb* linguistically, the debate that arises cannot be separated from two interpretations: *jilbāb* as a garment that covers the head of a woman and *jilbāb* as a general garment that covers the entire body of a woman. This definition is also similar to what is expressed by several tafsir scholars, such as Muhammad Quraish Shihab, who states that *jilbāb* is a headscarf or a garment that covers a woman's awrah. If *jilbāb* is understood as a headscarf, then the command to draw the *jilbāb* means making the headscarf looser, whereas if it is understood as a woman's garment, then it means the command is to cover the hands and feet (Daud, 2013; Shihab, 2018; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020; Wartini, 2014). A medieval mufasir like al-Qurtubi also expressed his opinion regarding the meaning of *jilbāb*, stating that *jilbāb* is a cloth wider than a shawl, and the cloth in question is a garment used to cover the entire body of a woman (al-Qurtubī, 2006; Daud, 2013; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020).

Ibn Ashur, one of the modern-contemporary mufasir, provides a more extensive review regarding the meaning of *jilbāb* in this verse. According to him, *jilbāb* can be understood as a garment smaller than a cloak but larger than a headscarf. This cloth is placed over the head and extends on both sides of the headscarf through the cheeks to the back of the shoulders. The style of *jilbāb* is adjusted to the preferences of women and its form cannot be separated from the customs of a society. However, the purpose of the command to draw the *jilbāb* in this verse is to distinguish between slave women and free women, so that free women can be more easily recognized and not disturbed by hypocrites of that time (‘Ashūr, 1984; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). Based on the definitions provided by these mufasir, most agree that *jilbāb* is a garment worn by women to cover their awrah, particularly from the head to the chest. Its socio-historical context was to differentiate between free women and slave women during the time of Prophet Muhammad, with the goal of protecting women from the advances of mischievous men. Regarding its form, Ibn Ashur further writes that the form of *jilbāb* can be separated from the socio-cultural context of a society. Concerning the reason for the revelation of this verse, at least three narratives are found.

First Narration:

Narrated by al-Bukhari, from Aisha, she said that after the revelation of the hijab verse, Saudah (the wife of the Prophet) went out of the house for a certain need. She was a tall woman, easily recognizable by people. At that time, Umar saw her and said, "O Saudah! By Allah, we will recognize you no matter what. Therefore, think carefully, why are you going out?" Hurriedly, Saudah returned home, while Prophet Muhammad was at Aisha's house, holding a bone (while eating). When Saudah entered, she said, "O Messenger of Allah, I went out for a need, and Umar reproached me (because he still recognized me)." Because of this incident, this verse (Surah al-Ahzab [33]: 59) was revealed to the Prophet while he still had the bone in his hand. Then the Prophet said, "Indeed, Allah has permitted you to go out of the house for a need" (al-Zuhailī, 2009; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020).

Second and Third Narrations:

Narrated by Ibn Sa'ad in the book al-Tabaqat, from Abi Malik, he said that the wives of the Prophet once went out at night for relieving themselves. At that time, the

hypocrites bothered and harmed them. This was reported to the Prophet, so he admonished the hypocrites. They responded, "We only bothered the slave girls." Then the verse was revealed, "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." This narration is also reported by Ibn Sa'ad, from Hasan and Muhammad bin Ka'ab al-Qurazhi (al-Zuhaili, 2009; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020).

There are differences between the first narrative and the second and third narratives. In the first narrative, it is recounted that at one time, Saudah, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, went out for a particular need. Along the way, due to Saudah's tall stature that made her easily recognizable, she encountered Umar who said to her, "O Saudah, by Allah, we can still recognize you. Therefore, think carefully, why are you going out?" As a result of Umar's admonishment, Saudah promptly returned home to meet Prophet Muhammad and narrated the incident to him. The Prophet then responded that she (Saudah) was permitted to go out for her need. In the second and third narratives, although the name is not mentioned, they both describe a time when the wives of Prophet Muhammad went out to relieve themselves. While on their way, they were harassed by hypocrites. Consequently, they returned home and reported the incident to Prophet Muhammad, who rebuked the hypocrites. The hypocrites responded that they thought the women heading towards the place of relief were slave women.

The third narrative, at its core, mirrors the second, except it expands to depict that the temptation wasn't solely directed at Prophet Muhammad's wife but at all women who relieved themselves at night. Indeed, during that time, hypocrites often engaged in misconduct towards women by seducing them. These hypocrites justified their actions by asserting that there was no differentiation at that time between slave and free women based on their attire. In that era, most women typically wore pre-Islamic garments consisting of a qamis and headscarf. While many women did wear head coverings, they were often draped loosely over the head, leaving the chest and neck exposed. This is what led those hypocritical individuals to be tempted (Syamsuddin dkk., 2020).

During the time of Prophet Muhammad, before the revelation of Surah al-Ahzab [33], verse 59, it was common to wear the *jilbāb*, although not all women wore it yet. The *jilbāb* was often worn, especially for long journeys, but during nighttime, particularly when relieving themselves, free women rarely wore it. This made it difficult to distinguish free women, making it easy for mischievous men to harass them, assuming these free women were slaves (Safri, 2014; Suhendra, 2016; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). This practice eventually affected the wives of Prophet Muhammad, prompting the revelation of this verse to establish a rule that the daughters of believers, the wives of Prophet Muhammad, and believing women should extend their *jilbābs* when they leave their homes. From this, it can be understood that the specific context of this revelation was to protect free women from being easily tempted by hypocrites. The *jilbāb* served as a means to protect them and distinguish them clearly as free women.

The pervasive temptation of women by hypocritical men during that time cannot be divorced from the patriarchal social structure of Arab society, which tended to devalue women socially (Safri, 2014; Suhendra, 2016; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). This was particularly evident when Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59 was revealed, around the third to seventh year after Hijrah, a critical period for the Muslim community as they had just experienced defeat in the Battle of Uhud. As a consequence of this defeat, Muslims were not seen as a respected community. This often led to Muslims, especially Muslim women, being looked down upon. Even before this defeat, Arab women were always objectified, tempted, and pursued by men. Islam, through Prophet Muhammad and the Quran, aimed to elevate the status of believing women as a whole, including the wives and daughters of

the Prophet. This can be seen in the revelation of Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59, which commanded believing women at that time to extend their *jilbābs* *jilbābnya* (Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). Extending the *jilbāb* was not only a distinguishing mark between slave women and free women, but substantively, it was also to protect women from undesirable actions by men by covering their *awrah*.

Rereading the Verse on Jilbāb in the Qur'an and the Inclusive Space for Women in the Public Sphere

The concept of *jilbāb* mentioned in Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59, was not intended to introduce a new way of dressing, as this concept had been known long before Islam (Marinda, 2019; Safri, 2014). The *jilbāb* concept in this verse emphasizes a dress style that distinguishes between slave women and free women. This understanding implies that historically, the command to extend the *jilbāb* in this verse did not impose Sharia requirements on all women; rather, it established a new dress code or standard for free Muslim women at that time, enabling them to be recognized. Before this verse was revealed, distinguishing the attire of free women from that of slave women was often challenging, leading mischievous men to harass free women who should have been respected in their dignity and status. Therefore, the substantive function of regulating this attire was to protect women, not to demonstrate the piety or faith of Muslim women, but rather to ensure the safety and dignity of free women (Daud, 2013; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020).

Historical concepts of *jilbāb* at the time when this verse was revealed are inseparable from the social setting of Arab society, which still operated under a system of slavery. Therefore, the command in this verse was specifically directed towards free women. Slaves during this period did not receive serious attention from Arab society. Slave women were deemed to have no dignity, often subjected to degradation, harassment, and treated as playthings for men. This attitude did not extend to free women at that time, although socially, Arab society tended to be patriarchal, resulting in instances of subordination even for free women, albeit not to the same extent as slave women. To prevent the degradation and harassment faced by both slave and free women, the Qur'an commanded the distinction between these two classes of women by prescribing the wearing of *jilbāb* as explicitly stated in Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59. This identification helped minimize arbitrary treatment of women during that period (Syamsuddin dkk., 2020).

The *jilbāb*, functioning as a means of identification for women, actually existed before Islam arrived. Historically, the *jilbāb* was clothing commonly worn by women from noble classes outside of Arabia, which later spread into Arab regions. Thus, originally, the *jilbāb* was not an Arab dress culture but originated from non-Arab cultures that were later adopted by the Arab people, becoming an ancient cultural garment. The *jilbāb* as women's attire has been discussed in the Code of Bilalama (3000 BC), then continued in the Code of Hammurabi (2000 BC), and the Code of Assyria (1500 BC). In the Assyrian legal texts, the *jilbāb* was closely associated with social stratification within society. The Assyrian legal texts specify which women must wear the *jilbāb* and which are not allowed to wear it. During this period, noblewomen were required to wear the *jilbāb*, while their servants were not obligated to wear it, but were required to wear it only when accompanying noblewomen in their duties (Marinda, 2019; Safri, 2014).

Based on the explanations provided, it can be understood that the essence of the command regarding *jilbāb* in Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59, is to protect free women from malicious men, particularly hypocrites who enjoy teasing and mistreating women arbitrarily. Here, the *jilbāb* functions as a means of identification and prevention so that free women are not tempted and not treated as inferior women to be mistreated at will. Through this command of wearing the *jilbāb*, hypocritical men of that time had no reason to humiliate Muslim women, especially free Muslim women. Even before Islam, the *jilbāb* served as an effective means of clothing that indicated the respected status of a woman.

Therefore, considering this context, the interpretation of *jilbāb* in Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59, which was revealed as an effort to protect women, can be interpreted as a dynamic tool that can be adapted and expanded according to the development of place and time. Because *jilbāb* as clothing is something local and temporal, while ensuring justice for women is something universal and everlasting (Daud, 2013; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020).

Today, the system of slavery no longer exists, meaning all women in the world are essentially free. When the command for wearing the *jilbāb* is interpreted as a form of protection for women, it can be understood not only as an internal and specific form of protection, namely the *jilbāb* as clothing, but also as an external and general form of legal and social protection for women. In the contemporary era, violence and sexual harassment against women still occur frequently across various parts of the world, regardless of social status, religion, or whether the woman wears a *jilbāb* or not. Therefore, the issue of protecting women is urgent and must be addressed. Marginalization, discrimination, subordination, and violence against women continue to persist across generations. It's not just sexual harassment; discriminatory practices against women who wear the *jilbāb* are also common. As previously mentioned, women who decide to wear the niqab often face stigmatization as being "Arab-like," and in more extreme cases, they are perceived as radical (Adam, 2023; Mujahidin, 2019; Rahayu dkk., 2023; Sudirman, 2019).

Negatively stigmatizing women who wear the niqab is certainly unjustifiable. When linked to the significance of the verse, the spirit of protection in that verse can be contextualized as social protection. Certain dress ethics or norms, such as wearing loose clothing, a headscarf, or even a niqab, can be maintained as means to prevent harassment and assault against women. These modes of dress are preferable to women wearing tight and revealing clothes, which may invite more temptation and harassment from malicious men (Daud, 2013; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). Therefore, wearing the *jilbāb* in any form is acceptable as long as it remains within the boundaries of propriety and decency. There needs to be social reconstruction that provides inclusive space for women wearing the *jilbāb* in any form. It is not justifiable to label certain forms of the *jilbāb* as "radical" or, more extremely, as "terrorist." The diversity in *jilbāb* forms cannot be separated from different interpretations of texts containing relative truths. Thus, when a woman adheres to a particular interpretation of the *jilbāb*, her right to express her religious beliefs should be protected.

However, wearing modest clothing or *jilbāb* is not the only way to prevent harassment, sexual violence, or other discriminatory actions. For instance, a survey conducted by the Safe Public Space Coalition (KRPA) concluded that harassment and sexual violence against women are not always caused by the victim's clothing. The survey found that women wearing long *jilbāb* are still targets of violence and sexual harassment (Damarjati, 2024; Syamsuddin dkk., 2020). Similarly, discriminatory actions against women wearing *jilbāb* in the workplace often occur, where they are either differentiated or not allowed to wear *jilbāb* for certain reasons, such as having a non-Muslim boss or the demand to appear attractive (Malabar dkk., 2022; Sari, 2014; Umar, 2018). Based on these phenomena, it is necessary to create legislation with legal consequences aimed at protecting women's expression in public spaces so that they do not fear sexual harassment or discriminatory actions in the workplace.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the interpretations of scholars, both classical and modern, regarding the *jilbāb* verse are very diverse. The forms of *jilbāb* in scholars' interpretations can be typologically grouped into two forms: *jilbāb* as a head covering for women and *jilbāb* as modest clothing for women. Despite differences in the interpretation of the form of *jilbāb*, scholars agree that the substantive command for women to wear *jilbāb* is to protect their dignity and honor. Referring to the context of the revelation of Surah Al-

Ahزاب, verse 59, this protection was specifically for free women, distinguishing them from slave women. However, since slavery no longer exists today as it has been abolished, the moral-universal values from this verse to protect women can be applied more broadly. Thus, the protection of women, which is the essence of the verse, must be provided to all women. In today's context, the protection of Muslim women cannot only be understood internally, meaning it should not be limited to just wearing a *jilbāb* or modest clothing for women.

It is a fact that due to the various interpretations of the form of *jilbāb*, some women wearing certain types of *jilbāb*, such as the niqab, face negative stigma. Similarly, it is a fact that some women who wear *jilbāb* often face discrimination because of their attire at work, especially in workplaces that are predominantly non-Muslim or that prioritize the appearance of their employees. Based on these facts, there must be a discourse on the legal and social protection of women wearing *jilbāb*, asserting that any form of discrimination and harassment against women wearing *jilbāb* in the public sphere is unacceptable. Wearing a *jilbāb* is a form of religious expression that should be protected both legally and socially. The findings of this study align with the research by Aizul Maula titled "Contextualization of the Meaning of Jilbab in the Qur'an: Application of *Ma'nā-cum-Maghzā* to Q.S. (33): 59," which emphasizes the importance of legal protection for women. However, this study adds by also emphasizing the importance of social protection for women wearing *jilbāb*, thus considering the need for a more inclusive social construction discourse regarding forms of religious expression in the public sphere.

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