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The Hijab as Gift: Mechanisms of Community Socialisation in the Muslim Diaspora

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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Abstract

In the worldwide Islamic diaspora today, how does the socialisation of women into Islamic belief and observance operate? This chapter considers such matters in the contemporary Finnish context. It deals with issues of bodily comportment and types of garments intended to be expressive of Islamic piety, and made available by the globalised Islamic fashion industry. The focus is on the means whereby sartorial objects are used to encourage females to adopt certain kinds of practices, thought to be expressive of the religious norms of particular diasporic communities. Attention is directed to what happens when one woman gives another woman an Islamic garment as a gift. The gift brings with it a set of obligations on the part of the receiver, which functions as often potent means of ensuring acceptance of group norms as to acceptable and unacceptable visual appearance and behaviour. We discuss this with reference to Marcel Mauss's classical anthropological work on the institution of gift-giving. It is found that Mauss's original insights continue to be valuable for understanding socialisation processes in globalised, diaspora contexts today.

Keywords: hijab, Muslim women, gift, veil, Islam, Mauss

1. Introduction

One of the most important features of the worldwide Islamic diaspora at the present time is how the socialisation of individuals into Islamic belief and observance operates. How the transnational migration of people, ideas and practices affect modes and methods of socialisation requires careful consideration. This chapter considers such matters in relation to the socialisation of women into Islamic religious observance in a contemporary north-west European context, namely Finland. Any consideration of the relations between Islam, women

and gender has to deal with the sometimes controversial issues surrounding Islamic female dress and bodily comportment. This includes types of garments intended to cover parts of the female body in certain ways that are taken to be expressive of Islamic piety. Such clothing objects are often made available to women and their families by a complexly globalised Islamic fashion industry, the latter being part of broader trends towards the appearance of multiple Islamic cultural industries [1]. (For an extensive review of the production and consumption of Islamic garments, see [2]).

Garments conventionally associated with Islamic observance are important tools for socialising individual women into the expectations of Islamic faith, as these are held by both local and transnational religious groupings. Garments can of course be used by women as means of individualisation and resistance to group norms [2]. Here, by contrast, we will focus on the means whereby such sartorial objects are used by representatives of religious groups to encourage females to adopt certain kinds of practices, which are thought to be expressive of the religious norms of a given community.

A potentially powerful means of socialisation and persuasion in this regard is the act of gift-giving. We focus on what happens, or what is intended to happen, when one woman gives another the gift of some sort of Islamic garment. When such an object is rendered as a gift, it brings with it a set of obligations on the part of the receiver, and these obligations function as often potent means of ensuring acceptance of group norms as to acceptable and unacceptable visual appearance and behaviour. We consider the obligatory nature of gifts, which pull recipients into a broader social system (here, observance of religious rules and community norms), in light of Marcel Mauss's classical anthropological work on the institution of gift-giving [3].

Since Mauss's time, gift-giving has been widely acknowledged by social scientists as an important form of socialisation. For Islamic people today, gift-giving is tied up in various ways with diaspora, migration, and the Islamic fashion industry [4, 5]. Life in diaspora contexts necessarily transforms the ways a religious or ethnic community operates, creating new practices that may be different from those back in the country of origin. Younger generations are engaged in different sorts of religious practices from earlier generations, as well as creating newer forms of gift-giving. One major innovation here is the ubiquity of giving low-cost Islamic garments, often with the aim of recruiting new believers into religious observance. The low prices of such garments are made possible by the ready availability of them made possible by the globalisation of the Islamic fashion industry [1]. The easy access to clothing of this sort makes some women's wardrobes so large that charitable gift-giving becomes not just possible, but instead a practical necessity, as well as a religious imperative, as we will see below.

The empirical material that we consider here is drawn from ethnographic fieldwork carried out by one of the authors (Almila) in 2011–2012 among Islamic diaspora groupings in Finland [6]. The particular groups in question are Finnish-born converts to Islam, and Iraqi Shi'a and Somali Sunni migrants to Finland.¹ In each case, gift-giving and gift-receiving functioned as

¹Migration of these ethnic groups into Finland is a relatively recent phenomenon [7], and all the women cited here are first generation immigrants.

important ways in which the broader religious group to which women already belonged, or were about to enter, sought to invite, encourage, and compel those women to dress in certain ways, and thus to act and think in manners felt to be appropriate by the group at large or by the moral leaders within it. Standing behind such micro-level practices of gift-exchange stand a range of macro-level and often transnational factors, including competing interpretations of Islam. Through gift-giving, these interpretations are projected onto material objects, which in turn work as subtle but compelling tools of socialisation of individuals into community norms and relations.

Garments, as material objects invested through gift-giving with deep religious significance, are taken out of both the capitalist commodity economy and the realm of the globalised Islamic fashion system, and come to operate within more localised moral economies characteristic of particular migrant and convert groups. This allows us to focus on a relatively under-researched area, that of the micro-politics of Islamic veiling within communities, in contrast to much of the academic literature, which often focuses on Islamic cultural industries and the intrusion of macro-level politics into everyday life [4–5, 8]. We also show the ongoing relevance of Mauss's ideas about gift-giving for understanding phenomena of religious socialisation.

2. Thinking about gift-giving

Since the initial publication in 1925 of Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (translated into English as *The Gift*) [3], there has been a huge amount of critical responses to his claims about the roles played by gifts in human societies, some being sympathetic extensions of his arguments, others involving sometimes severe refutations of the work on theoretical or empirical grounds [9]. Nonetheless, the central arguments remain influential in understanding how gifts operate within particular social contexts.

The general thrust of Mauss's argument is that the phenomenon of the gift is highly ambivalent. Gifts operate in the socio-psychological spaces that exist between sets of opposed values: kindness and aggression, disinterestedness and self-interest, cooperation between individuals and conflict between them, care for others and endeavours to control them, giving away wealth and making personal gain, the power of the giver over the receiver (and vice versa), inner volition and social obligation and interior piety and the social display of virtue [10, 11]. Gifts are uneasily, yet dynamically, located within a complex social-psychological terrain.

For Mauss, in most if not all societies, a great deal of 'everyday morality is concerned with the question of obligation and spontaneity in the gift' [3]. On this view, the act of one person giving a gift to another is at one level a spontaneous and self-willed act of kindness, and may very well be experienced as such by the giver. But the giving and receiving of gifts is a social, rather than individual-psychological, phenomenon *par excellence*. Gifts, 'which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous ... are in fact obligatory and interested ... the gift [may be apparently] generously offered ... [but] the transaction itself is [in fact] based

on obligation' [3]. Thus surface-level generosity masks tacit, subterranean but nonetheless powerful forms of obligation, whether or not the giver is explicitly conscious of this fact, or whether s/he intends it to have that effect.

The receiver of the gift is in fact under two forms of obligation, sanctioned by the social group to which (often but not always) both giver and receiver belong. First, there is an obligation to accept the gift being offered. Refusing to accept a gift is like 'a declaration of war', because it involves 'refusal of friendship' and other forms of positive social intercourse [3]. Moreover, a person 'does not have the right to refuse a gift ... [because to] do so would show fear of having to repay ... admitting defeat in advance' [3]. '[Y]ou accept [the gift] ... because you mean to take up the challenge and prove that you are not unworthy' of the gift you are being offered [3].

However, Mauss adds that, 'in certain circumstances ... a refusal can be an assertion of victory and invincibility' [3]. A refusal to receive a proffered gift is possible if the putative receiver has both the personal bravery and social resources necessary to resist the blandishments of the putative donor, refusing their overtures to enter into a gift-giving relationship, while being content to risk giving potentially grave offence to the would-be donor.

Second, there is an obligation for the receiver, after a certain period of time, to reciprocate the initial gift, by in turn giving the original giver another gift, the counter-gift. The initial receiver is strongly obliged 'to make a return gift for a gift received' [3]. Strong social sanctions are attendant on someone who fails to return a gift. In this social situation, the return gift usually must be of equal or greater value to the initial gift. According to Mauss, we 'must always return more than we receive; the return [gift] is always bigger and more costly' than the original one [3]. '[S]uch a return will give the donor [i.e. the initial recipient] authority and power over the original donor, who now becomes the latest recipient' [3].

In other words, the power gained over the initial receiver by the initial donor is reversed, when the counter-gift shifts the balance of power back towards the initial recipient, who now as donor gains the moral high ground. We can add that a counter-gift need not necessarily take the same form as the gift. As we will see below, the gift of an Islamic garment can be repaid by the recipient through publicly shifting their visual appearance and their behaviour in the direction felt to be appropriate by the donor. In this way, certain gifts can operate as powerful mechanisms of socialising people into the observance of certain religious and/or community norms.

An initial round of gift-giving is very likely to provoke a further series of gifts and counter-gifts between both parties involved, a process that may last a long time, possibly even for life. The important point here is that through the initial stimulus of the first gift, both donor and receiver are pulled into a social system that is given both life and permanence by the to-ing and fro-ing of gift exchange [12]. There is an 'obligation upon the [gift partners] thereafter to make perpetual gift-exchange' [3]. This explains why 'it is the nature of the gift in the end to be ... its own reward', because the initial expenditure by the first donor leads to a chain of counter-gifts, which tends to be of at least equal value to the initial gift, and the existence of the chain itself may bring various benefits to the original donor [3]. Yet gifts are also deeply ambivalent, precisely because of the combination of 'intimacy and ... fear which

arise from th[e] reciprocal creditor-debtor relationship' [3]. The intimate nature of the giver-receiver relationship fundamentally goes together with the risk of 'losing face' if one cannot adequately reciprocate the donor with an appropriate counter-gift [3]. To be unable to proffer an adequate counter-gift is to lose honour, social status and self-esteem.

The gift-exchange chain need not (and according to Mauss, does not usually) involve a simple dyadic relationship between two individuals. Instead, if the donor is (or presents themselves as) a representative of a given social group, then the receiver is pulled into a set of obligations to, and forms of reciprocity with, that group as well as with the individual donor. This is why for Mauss the gift is 'a means of controlling others', for the obligations involved in the gift relationship entail that the initial receiver comes into the gravitational pull of the group of which the initial donor is, or presents themselves as, a representative. In so doing, the gift opens pathways by which the group can instil its values into the mindset and behaviour of the initial recipient [3].

That is why the gift-giving process can act as a very effective means of socialisation. The latter term is conventionally taken to refer to processes whereby a child born into a particular group is inducted into the habits, values, outlooks and so on of that particular community. But gift-giving can operate as a means whereby adults raised within the cultural parameters of one group may be pulled towards observing obligations to another group, those obligations involving some level of subscription to the values of the group to which the gift donor belongs. Alternatively, gift-giving can operate as a means of re-socialisation of existing group members, pulling them back more thoroughly than hitherto into the moral life of the group. This may happen especially in cases where the donor may perceive the recipient to be exhibiting less strongly than would be desirable the attitudes and practices of the group.

Some other features of gift-giving identified by Mauss are also pertinent here. The object that is given as a gift is transformed from being a mundane material thing into a special sort of entity. In many non-capitalist economies, things are thoroughly bound up with the persons who make or give them; the personality of the maker or giver is felt to inhere within the object in profound ways. This stands in stark contrast to capitalist economic logic, which disentangles the object from those who made or passed it on to a consumer [13]. Once the capitalist consumer has purchased the object, it is (usually) wholly 'theirs'. But gifts work differently, and gift relationships that exist within a broader capitalist economy may still operate according to their own specific logics that are irreducible to capitalist market principles. This is because gifted 'objects are never completely separated from the [people] who exchange them' [3]. Therefore, if we are dealing with gift relationships rather than capitalist market transactions alone, then the giver retains 'a magical and religious hold over the recipient' [3]. This is because the object is felt to be invested with some of the spiritual essence, or the soul, of the giver.

For example, one might be reluctant to sell on e-Bay a gift received from a favourite relative, even if the object itself is not particularly appealing. The object seems like an avatar of the favoured person, and so to give it away or sell it seems somehow wrong, because to do that would be to insult the image of the person who gave it to you. The spiritual element of the gift is a pronounced one: when giving a gift, 'one gives away ... a part of one's nature and

substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence' [3]. The process of gifting and counter-gifting involves not mere economic exchange but rather 'a pattern of spiritual bonds between things which are to some extent parts of persons' [3]. As the spiritual presence of the person who originally gave the gift resides within and lingers around it, then the gift received is owned by the receiver, 'but the ownership is of a particular kind', for the gift retains strong traces of the personal charisma of the person who first offered it. For Mauss, this shows that the gift is a complex of different properties which modern, Western thought usually separates from each other: it is simultaneously both 'property and a possession, a pledge and a loan, an object sold and an object bought', among other things [3].

In other words, a received gift is not a mere object; it is a powerful reminder of someone else, and most likely of the social group that stands behind them too. Wearing such an object, then, is a potent and embodied reminder of the desires of the donor and of the group to which s/he belongs. To wear a gift garment is to acquiesce, at least to some degree, in the intentions of the donor and their social group. By wearing such a garment, I start to resemble, to some degree, the image that the donor and their group have of me, or the image which they want me to have.

Any object can potentially take on the special qualities of a gift; it just must be given to a recipient in the spirit of gift exchange. As Mauss puts the point, 'everything is stuff to be given away and repaid ... [thus becoming] a perpetual interchange of what we may call spiritual matter' [3]. So deeply can objects be invested with special significance by both donors and receivers, that for those in a gift-giving chain these objects can come to seem to have 'a virtue of their own which [itself seems to] cause ... them to be given and [in turn] compels the making of counter-gifts' [3]. In essence, once objects become gifts, those 'things have personality', [3] and are felt to have a special sort of resonance and charisma. They possess both the traces of the personality of the individual donor, and of the group to which s/he belongs. For example, a Bible given by a grandmother to a grand-daughter resonates with the personality not only of the esteemed elderly relative but also, because it is an explicitly religious object of the Christian church, community and belief system to which the grandmother belongs and subscribes. The Bible-gift seeks to pull the child into the ambit of the religious community of which the more senior woman feels herself to be part and representative of.

We can note here that some authors have pointed to the especially strong bonds between women, whether as relatives or as friends, that can be created through gift-giving processes [14]. We can add that certain objects will be defined by particular groups as being especially worthy of being given as gifts. Weiner's extension and critique of Mauss's original formulations notes that hand-made objects, especially those made by donors themselves, operate as particularly powerful gifts, as they very deeply embed the personality of the maker-donor into the material fabric of the object. Objects that are not made by donors, but which are framed by donors as having been very carefully selected and sought out by them for the recipient, can also take on strong traces of the donor's personality [15].

Objects that a given community regards as especially spiritual are also likely to operate as particularly potent gifts. An object already defined as somehow spiritually *special* is particularly

amenable to be used as a gift and transformed into an even more unique entity. People in Islamic communities are likely to think that garments for women, which indicate the wearer's piety are particularly suitable to be defined and used as gifts. An Islamic headscarf given as a gift is made *doubly special*. It both reverberates with piety, because it is understood by all relevant parties as an expression and embodiment of faith, and it is also disentangled from capitalist economic relationships, being rendered as superior to them by dint of being proffered not as a mere object for sale, but rather as a gift, that is, as a part of an apparently disinterested, friendly gesture on the behalf of one Muslim believer towards another. The Islamic headscarf has the potential to function as an exceptionally powerful and compelling gift. To refuse to accept it would require a great deal of bravery and social resources on the behalf of the intended recipient. It is usually very difficult to turn down an object so deeply invested with the powers of both piety and friendship, an exceptionally potent combination of socio-psychological properties.

The connections that can pertain between gift-giving and religions are complex, but one can note that the major world religions tend to stress the importance of believers giving gifts and alms, especially to those less fortunate than themselves. Donors are meant to expect no explicitly earthly return on their generous acts of gift-giving. Nonetheless, they may tacitly expect some credit in the afterlife on the basis of their religiously-inspired gift-giving in this world [16]. Once again, we see that the act of gift-giving oscillates between the display of selfless generosity on the one side, and on the other, the expectation that one stands to achieve something by giving the gift away. This applies as much to explicitly religious gifts as to any others. This is worth bearing in mind as we now turn to examine the empirical data concerning gift-giving among Muslim women.

3. The hijab as an invitation

Aisha², a Finnish woman in her mid-20s, converted to Islam at the age of 18. Having grown up in a small Finnish town, she now lives in Helsinki, the capital city, and studies at a university. Soon after her conversion, she arranged her marriage to an Arab man through her religious community, and they now have one child. Aisha's views and dress choices – a full-length khimar³ and previously also the niqab⁴ – reflect a conservative interpretation of Islam, and she regularly visits a mosque that some other Finns consider 'Salafi-influenced'. Aisha is very articulate and critical of what she considers the cultural and commercial objectification of the female body in Finland and in 'the West' more generally.

²All names of the interviewees have been changed.

³Khimar refers to a head-covering, initially worn by both women and men. By the 1980s, khimar had come to mean 'a headcover that covers the hair and extends low to the forehead, comes under the chin to conceal the neck, and falls down over the chest and back'. [17] Khimars come in different lengths: below the hips, down to the knees, and full-length with sleeves.

⁴Niqab is an Arabic face-veil, 'a free-flowing piece of black cloth of various lengths that covers the lower part of the face'. [18] It typically leaves the eyes visible, although there are niqabs that can be used to cover the eyes as well. More recently, niqabs have been available in a variety of colours.

Aisha told the interviewer how she, after reading the Qur'an and believing it to be 'the truth', learned more about the practicalities of Islam. Through an internet discussion forum, she made the acquaintance of a Somali Muslim woman of her own age, and learned more about everyday life as a Muslim.

I visited her a couple of times and she showed me how to pray and gave me a scarf and then an abaya. ... So, I actually started to wear them and pray before I had said Shahada [the declaration of belief].

As Muslim women are required to veil when praying, such garment gifts have a practical value for the new convert when she learns to pray and to integrate her new religion into her daily life routines. The gift serves the purpose of encouraging her to veil and operates as a welcome to the community.

Such gifts are often easily given and considered neither too personal nor too valuable to accept. They are typically bought cheaply from sources outside Finland, and as commodities operate in the cheaper end of globalised fashion systems. However, as Mauss reminds us, a gift is normally given and received under obligation, and in the process of gift-giving, it turns from mere commodity into something more spiritual and socially meaningful. In this case, the scarf and the abaya can be seen as a covert attempt to convert someone (or at least to encourage their conversion), and one of the gift's purposes is to bind the receiver, if not to the gift-giving individual per se, then to the Muslim community as a whole through a sense of gratitude and obligation to return the favour. New converts who are on the receiving side are expected to contribute back to the community, which the original donor represents, later on. Rather than creating a bond between two individuals, the gift therefore aims to create a bond between an individual and the community, imposing certain expectations with regard to appearance and behaviour onto the potential convert woman.

There has been a significant shift in Somali interpretations of Islam as the Somali diaspora has spread across the world. While many of the older generation are Sufist, many of the younger generation are influenced by trends of the global Islamic revival, and particularly those actively marketed by Saudi Arabia [19]. Many young Somalis are also involved in Da'wah ('calling to Islam'). This is a form of missionary work, which targets both non-Muslims and also Muslims deemed to be not the 'right' kind of believers and religious practitioners. Popular among various Arab populations and, in the US especially, black converts to Islam, Da'wah work is sometimes associated with conservative (or even radical) views of Islam. In Aisha's case, the presumed intention of the original donor bore fruit: Aisha is now a moral leader with conservative religious views, and lectures to other young Finnish converts to Islam. She has been successfully socialised into a religious community, and the original garment gifts she received some years ago played an important role in this regard.

The following story exemplifies the nuances within the Finnish Somali community with regards to interpretations of Islam. Nura is a Somali Muslim woman in her mid-20s. She arrived in Finland as a teenager and is married to a Somali man from her own clan. The marriage was arranged by their families, and both spouses share Salafi-influenced views of their religion. The interviewer was passed leaflets to that effect from the husband when visiting their home, but never actually met him in person as he firmly stayed in his room when the female

interviewer visited his wife. Nura wears the long khimar and the niqab, and believes that others should do so too. While she stressed that the wearing of the hijab should be everyone's own personal choice, she also stated that she is 'advising' her younger sister to conform to more conservative dress styles, which the sister apparently resists. This kind of pressure was fairly common in this community, and was not considered to be in any sort of conflict with the requirement that wearing the hijab be 'freely chosen'.

In this regard, garment gifts may also serve the purpose of encouraging the wearing of a certain kind of hijab, and thus fostering the 'right' kind of representation of the religious and ethnic community. Such gifts are given under specific conditions, and usually follow the receiver's desire to change her dress (and the giver's desire to support her decision), rather than as a general encouragement for veiling. As Nura explained,

Just this summer I gave up a scarf I've worn for many, many years. It was very dear to me... But... in my opinion it was useless to leave it in the closet; I got a migraine and I couldn't [wear it]. Someone else wanted to start [wearing] the [khimar], which is a great thing if another Muslim wants to cover herself more. I was very glad [and] I gave it to her.

Thus, giving away a garment to which she had an emotional bond was justified for Nura for two reasons: her inability to wear it (negative reason), and the other woman's need for it (positive reason – it encourages a deeper level of Islamic observance). Here, she practices a certain level of sacrifice, which is discussed in more detail below. The gift signified her encouragement and acceptance of the other woman's choice to 'cover more', as well as materially making that more possible and more likely. Such gifts are not simply about linkages between individuals, but are also about the expressing, forging and maintaining of networks within the ethnic/religious community [3]. The gift works as an invitation for a particular woman to be included in a particular group of veiling women, which in turn pulls her into the orbit of the religious norms of the broader community to which that particular group subscribes.

4. The hijab as connection-maker

Miriam, a Finnish woman in her late 20s, had a very different conversion story. She also dresses very differently from Aisha, preferring long skirts, long-sleeved tops and a small scarf that covers her hair but not her neck. Converted 2 years prior to the time of the interview, she had no connection to any local Muslim communities, and her only Muslim contacts were her Arab husband and his family, who live abroad. Miriam has one child, and is practically a single mother in her husband's absence. She tells the history of her scarf-wearing as follows:

In Finland, I've worn this kind of a scarf [a small scarf covering most of the hair and the ears but not the neck] since the spring... It was actually because in 2010 we visited Jordan and I wore there for the first time the full scarf and the family saw me wearing it... Then [my husband's] brother came to visit [Finland]... and when I heard he's coming and thought that they've seen me with the scarf and I kind of can't appear with them without the scarf so I started wearing this... I couldn't imagine myself any more without a scarf in front of the family.

When Miriam married her husband, the husband's family asked if she wanted to convert to Islam. When she refused, the topic was never brought up again. Muslim men, unlike Muslim women, are allowed to marry a non-Muslim, so there is no doctrinal compulsion for conversion of the bride [20]. Nor had her husband ever indicated, after she eventually did convert to Islam, that he would wish her to veil, or indeed that he had any opinion on her dress whatsoever. However, Miriam herself had a desire for continuity of dress in front of her husband's family and thus compromised between what she calls the 'full hijab' (and which she considers 'ideal'), and a version of it that can be worn in Finland without risking drawing too much attention to herself. Her choice is even more interesting in the light of what she says about her Finnish family:

I didn't tell [them about my conversion] directly; they've been left to deduce it from the changes that have happened to me. They've not said anything [negative] about it, and my mother even wanted to buy me a scarf, which was really nice. We were at the [open air] market in Porvoo, they have handmade woollen scarves there, and it was really kind of her because I think they think I've converted because of my husband.

In a Finnish cultural context where the family does not necessarily communicate through expressing themselves in verbal and direct ways – a fairly typical situation in many Finnish families – a garment-gift may gain considerable significance, for it eloquently says that one's choice of religion – and by extension, one's broader lifestyle – is accepted and even supported by one's family. This kind of gift is also highly emotionally invested. A valuable gift, handmade (if not by the donor) [15], and embedded in intimate family relations, the gift clearly carries the personality of its donor, in this case, Miriam's mother, a non-Muslim who nonetheless wishes to signify her acceptance of her daughter's religious choices and forms of norm-observance.

A garment gift may also signify a new family bond created through marriage. Many of the women interviewed in the study mentioned scarves and other garments that they were given by their mothers-in-law. For example, Afra, an Iraqi Shi'a Muslim woman in her early twenties, married her husband in an arranged marriage.

It was through my aunt. His sister asked if I'm married. ... Then they came to visit and asked for my hand and my father asked me what I think, do I agree? I asked what do you [both the parents] think, what kind of a family is it? The family is good and it has a good reputation, we knew this is a high-status family... [O]ne doesn't look at the boy what he's like, what he's done, but at the family. Because the family is responsible for the son. If he does something [wrong], the family takes the responsibility. I thought: that's a good family, the best family here in Finland, really good reputation, no one has as good a reputation here in Finland. So why not?

In the frame of Shi'a Iraqi marriage, reputation, as well as status, is something that a family holds as a unit, and thus every individual's behaviour is judged as part of that unit. Therefore, a family unit holds a position within a community that defines each family member's status in that community, but at the same time each individual contributes to her or his family's status position. In a 'traditional' Muslim view on marriage and women, the women's honour is directly connected to the family honour, and therefore the women of the family also strongly influence the family's honour through their actions [21].

In light of this, it is not very surprising that after her engagement, and especially upon her marriage, Afra faced new requirements regarding her dress code.

When I got married, my mother-in-law gave me clothes; she had bought them abroad... At that time I didn't yet wear a black long robe, I had trousers and a top down here [indicates below mid-thigh] and then the scarf. This robe⁵ I started to wear when I got married. It was [my husband's family's] wish and I said why not.

Here it is important to consider this requirement within the frame of the Finnish Iraqi Shi'a community. The family Afra married into is said to be directly descended from Prophet Mohammed. Within the Shi'a community, the descendants of Mohammed hold a special, very highly regarded position. They are also permitted to wear a certain special shade of green in their clothes, which makes them very recognisable within the community, particularly during celebrations. Such high status and clear visibility within the community is highly likely to motivate the family to protect their reputation more carefully than they might need to do otherwise.

Indeed, Afra learned that she was marrying into a family with stricter religious dress codes than her own family has. For example, her younger sisters wear trousers, tunics and scarves, while her husband's sisters all wear more covering forms of dress. (Afra's own family's responses to her dress changes are discussed in the next section.)

In respect to dress, we are different because they [the husband's family] all wear the abaya⁶ and the jilbab. When a girl goes to school, they dress [like that] immediately. Now [one young daughter] wears trousers and a tunic but they slowly teach her to wear the abaya... But us, mother wears the abaya and the jilbab but we don't, we wear jeans and tunics and skirts. We are different in the sense that it's not so particular, not so necessary to have the abaya. I didn't either, only when I married I put it on.

Afra's sister-in-law, Kayani, a Finnish convert woman who married into the same family, also wears the same more covering form of dress. But she frames her dress style as a personal choice that fits her character, personal convictions and sense of style better than the trousers and tops that she initially wore after her conversion.

I've always worn [covering clothes]; I've never been a [sleeveless] top-person. Our upbringing was such that in the summer I might have worn a tee-shirt, but I never wore anything horribly revealing. I've liked skirts and dresses. It wasn't a great change; it was actually just the scarf [that was new].

She altered her dress style before her marriage, stating that in the progression of her conversion career [23], she 'gained more courage' and therefore was able to embrace a more covering style which she felt was more 'like me'. Thus, she does not consider her dress choices to have anything to do with her husband's family but rather she believes that they derive from her personal integrity and preferences. In the eyes of the community, however, it is highly likely that her dress and behaviour are viewed in the context of family status and its protection. The hijab carries connotations of family reputation and intimate family connections, and gift-giving between women of different generations is a powerful means of enforcing family forms of control over individual women.

⁵Afra wears the jubbah, a long robe loosely covering the body from the neck down to the wrists and ankles. It is not unlike the better-known abaya (see next footnote).

⁶The abaya is 'a traditional Arab cloak that a person dons over his or her clothing when leaving the home', 'a long-sleeved robe that covers the body from the neck to the floor'. [22] Abayas are typically black but are often decorated, especially the sleeves and the fronts.

5. The sacrifice of goods and vanity

Both Afra, Shi'a Iraqi and Nura, Sunni Somali, spoke of certain kinds of sacrifices connected to their veiling. These were both more material sacrifices – involving giving away one's garments, contributing to charity through the giving of garment gifts – and also more personal sacrifices, involving the sacrificing of certain worldly desires.

On one occasion, Afra was interviewed together with her mother and her 19-year old sister. Afra's mother spoke limited Finnish, so her daughters interpreted her statements. It was clear that this Shi'a Iraqi family interprets religious dress as involving not just the wearing of certain garments thought to indicate piety, but also the intentions and motivations of the wearer herself. Afra explained how her mother interpreted Afra's attire:

The more you make an effort for the religion, the more you work, the better level of paradise you achieve... Mother makes a comparison that I who wear the long robe get more, because I'm young after all, want to dress fashionably, want to look pretty but I still cover myself for God. Because I fear God and put the long robe on, I get more virtues, I get more points. But [a woman who] dresses according to fashion, she gets less.

The sacrifice for her faith is framed as neither material nor directly social. It is rather a question of a sacrifice of one's supposed desires and vanity. A young woman who is expected to be vain and have a desire to dress fashionably, gains more religiously through her sacrifice of donning non-fashionable attire. It is not directly a question of covering the body to greater or lesser degrees, but more a question of embracing more sober styles of dress for the sake of enhancing one's religious credentials. Afra's sacrifice of being fashionable in order to win religious credibility is a kind of gift – she gives up to her community and to Islam in general her vanity, in the expectation that the counter-gift of religious approval will come her way in time. Moreover, she gives away her fashionable clothes. By redefining them as castoffs, she can disentangle her personality from those now unwanted and un-loved objects. This in turn opens up a symbolic space in her life, and a literal, physical space in her wardrobe, for more religiously suitable garments.

This is where her mother-in-law's gift garments came directly into play. These gifts that Afra was given were donated partly for the benefit of family reputation. The family into which Afra married dresses more conservatively than does Afra's family, and therefore the garment gifts powerfully socialised Afra into the norms of her new family, thereby ensuring in their eyes the maintenance of familial honour and perceived piety. Yet the garments were also given as gifts for the perceived religious benefit of Afra herself. Her in-laws gave her covering forms of dress in the belief that they would endow Afra with greater personal religiosity. Thus the gifts were at the same time acts of kindness and forms of spiritual care, while also acting in some ways as subtle acts of aggression, making demands as to how an individual now belonging to a high status family should dress, look and behave [3].

As mentioned above, the religious status a woman gains through wearing more obviously religious forms of dress is not only valid for herself but also for her family. Afra's mother, who herself wears the jubbah, throughout the interview stressed the fact that Afra dresses in a more covering manner, while she seldomly referred to her younger daughter's dress style.

She wears trousers, tops and tunics with a scarf. Yet the mother, Afra and Afra's sister all agreed that the sister is also appropriately covered, and the family seemed to exercise no direct pressure on her dress style.

This was unlike Nura, who admitted to openly criticising her sister's less conservative dress style. For Nura, religious duty is the most important aspect of dress, and it is the religious duty ascribed to her garments that makes them dear to her:

In my opinion the clothes aren't the thing, but that you obey God. If a garment serves that purpose it becomes important. Not so that you're attached to material, but you wear certain [clothes] because you're a Muslim and you obey God and that's it. Nothing else. In my opinion Muslims shouldn't cling to anything worldly. You wear what you wear because Allah has told you to and you obey God, and there's no greater reason.

Through duty to God, Nura's garments become both symbols of that duty and tools that help her to fulfil and meet it. At the same time, she recognised that 'people have favourite clothes', although she considered such preferences as worldly desires that should be discarded, along with the garments themselves. Here we see the opposite of the religiously approved gift, namely the cast-off, the garment deemed to have failed to meet certain religious standards. But while Nura states that clothing is important only insofar as it represents religious conviction and 'nothing else', she also, as we saw above, feels fondness of certain garments and needs a significant religious motivation finally to give them up. Indeed she sacrificed more than just a mere garment in the moment she described this way:

[The garment] was very dear to me... But... in my opinion it was useless to leave it in the closet; I got a migraine and I couldn't [wear it]. Someone else wanted to start [wearing] the [khimar], which is a great thing if another Muslim wants to cover herself more.

Nura describes how she had a khimar in her wardrobe, which she was not wearing but her sentimental attachment to it meant that she did not want just to throw it away. But when she found out that another woman was in need of such a garment, she was enthusiastic about giving it away as a gift. By gifting it, the object was treated with the respect she felt it was due, while it could function as a means of extending Muslim piety, by allowing another woman to have a style of dress which met the criteria of a pious look and behaviour. Turning the garment into a gift therefore solved a personal problem while extending the reach of the norms of Islam onto another person.

Charity is one of Islam's five pillars. Giving clothes to charity – whether Islamic or not – is also a way of controlling the number of garments one owns at any particular moment, while managing the guilt that the contradiction between consumerism and religion may well provoke. Nura explained in this vein:

I've also learned to recycle the clothes I don't wear anymore so that my closets won't be stuffed. So that I won't feel guilty for having closets full of clothes.

Charity is a particular kind of gift [16]. While the act of charitable giving can create bonds and debts of gratitude between individuals, it is also the case that Muslims recognise charitable giving as a religious duty, while the Muslim receiver of the charity is also aware of this. So when another young Somali woman, Zaynab, elaborately spoke of her charitable acts of

sending old garments to her home country, she was engaging in a different kind of act from what her community would consider a 'proper' gift (i.e. the giving of a new garment, not the donation of second-hand clothes).

This became evident when the interviewer discussed garment gifts with Khadija, an elderly Finnish convert who had a long history of being acquainted with Finland's Somali community before her conversion. Khadija had befriended many Somali families through her work for the City Council of Helsinki, and the community had learned to appreciate her efforts for their well-being. A group of women wanted to gift her a garment⁷ to show their appreciation. Before making the garment, the women came to show the fabric to Khadija, to demonstrate that the garment she was to receive was new and made specially for her. According to Khadija, this is crucial for Somali gift-giving: it would be unacceptable to give a second-hand gift. This is why it is so fundamentally different to engage in charitable giving (of used garments) as opposed to personal gift-giving (of new and bespoke clothes) within this community. This garment gift had all those women who participated in the selection, making and presenting of it embedded in the object itself. A 'proper' gift must come with personality, with spiritual charging, and thus it carries with it connotations of the whole Finnish-Somali diaspora community, which Khadija, as a Muslim, holds especially dear. It is important to stress how this kind of gift differs from the garment gifts described above. Those are cheap, industrially produced garments that gain their spiritual value from the purpose they are meant to fulfil. They are far from the personal, carefully selected and prepared gift that Khadija received. Yet both kind of gifts come with sets of social connections and expectations, and effectively enforce and strengthen links and connections between individuals and the ethnic-religious groups of which they are part or which they have joined.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered what happens when garments are passed as 'Islamic' gifts from one woman to another. By being rendered as gifts, such garments are symbolically charged in powerful ways. They are perceived not only as 'Islamic' and indicative of religious piety, but also as expressions of friendship, of the essence of the person who is the donor, and of the expectations and norms of the group to which the donor belongs. When passed between individuals, the garment-gifts create individual-to-individual, as well as group and community, bonds and a sense of inclusion and belonging, while also serving everyday functional purposes for the receiver. They draw symbolic community boundaries and establish alliances, inclusions and exclusions [25]. Bonds between the women of a particular family can be created and nurtured through garment gifts. Such gifts can also invite new members into a family and act as means whereby non-Muslims are converted to religious observance. These garments are essentially gifts of continuity, aimed at establishing long-term relationships

⁷Khadija described the garment as 'traditional Somali dress', which is likely to refer to Dirac. This is a type of garment that Finland's Somalis would nowadays wear only in gender-segregated celebrations, if even there. Dirac 'is a full-length, sleeveless, quadruple-shaped dress-like garment, often made of translucent fabric'. [24] It is the sleevelessness and transparency of this garment that makes it unsuitable for public appearances of veiling women.

which will uphold community bonds and religious practices. To receive such a gift is an honour; but to refuse them risks causing great offence, in terms of rejecting not only a personal overture but also the behavioural norms of the religious community which stands behind the donor. To refuse a garment-gift from a community member or family member risks certain sorts of social catastrophe. To fail to participate in expected ways in the community after receiving a garment gift can mean a severe loss of face. In such ways, garments given as gifts work as powerful means of socialisation and norm enforcement.

These are particularly female and 'Islamic' forms of gift-giving, yet they involve similar kinds of patterns of obligation, belonging, transmission of values and socialisation into expected behaviours as other types of gift-giving practices among other groups in different situations. Our empirical data here demonstrate that some of the original insights of Mauss as to pre-modern gifting practices are still compelling today, even when the nature of the physical objects being gifted is profoundly shaped by globalised garment industries and the conditions of ethnic diaspora. The gift remains today a powerful means of pulling individuals into dense webs of community connections.

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