In Java, Indonesia, the practice of women 'veiling' has become a modern symbol of Muslim identity, political activism, morality and consumerism. This practice of veiling encompasses a variety of different styles of women's clothing designed to cover all parts of the body, known as aurat, that should be concealed according to Islamic teachings (Warburton 2008:5; Brenner 1996:691). In Indonesia, clothing designed to cover a woman's aurat is called by the general term busana Muslim (Muslim clothing) and can range from a long black veil that reveals only the eyes (a niqab) to a brightly colored headscarf (jilbab) worn with an elaborate beaded tunic, jeans and high heels (Rinaldo 2008:30). This article will explore the significance of busana Muslim for Indonesians from the 1980's to the present day and examine how this practice has taken on so many seemingly contradictory symbolic meanings.

Busana Muslim, Political Activism and Muslim identity

The practice of veiling was not common in Indonesia until the 1990's. At Gadjah Mada University, for example, in the 1970's fewer than 3% of female students practiced busana Muslim, but now over 60% of the female students wear Islamic dress (Smith-Hefner 2007). This rapid rise in the popularity of veiling in Indonesia is known as the jilbabisasi phenomenon (Warburton 2008:3). The jilbabisasi phenomenon can be understood as part of a larger Islamic movement in Indonesia and across the globe. This Islamic movement in Indonesia began largely as a student movement linked with demands for democratization. In the 1960's, Indonesian students studying in the Middle East became influenced by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest and most influential Islamic organization in the world (Rinaldo 2008:28; Leiken & Brooke 2007:107). These students emphasized Islam as a way of life and were critical of any separation between religion and politics. In addition, the ideas of revolutionary Islam from Iran spread to Indonesia through books by prominent Shi'ite figures, such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Murtada Mutahhari. Female student activists in this movement began to wear the long black chador associated with Iranian women (Hasan 2009:233; Brenner 1996:677).

The important influence of Islamic movements from the Middle East on the Indonesian Islamic movement elucidates why Busana Muslim styles today have more in common with Middle Eastern clothing styles than with indigenous Indonesian clothing (Brenner 1996:675). Indeed, the Indonesian Islamic movement was seen by many as a very modern rupture from the past. Indigenous customs were perceived to be one of the greatest threats to contemporary Islam and many activists felt that their parents did not properly comprehend or follow Islam. This rejection of Javanese culture and parental authority may explain why many female activists' parents were dismayed and threatened by their daughters' choice to dress in busana Muslim. Parents feared that wearing Islamic dress like the jilbab would prevent their daughters from finding employment, negatively affect social interactions and brand them as fanatik (fanatical). Being seen as fanatical could be dangerous. In the early 1990's, rumors were spread alleging that women wearing jilbab in public spaces were concealing poisons and in a series of incidents young men threw stones at veiled women (Brenner 1996:580-2). The practice of veiling was thus seen as socially marginal and politically radical prior to the mid-1990's and this marginality was perceived as dangerous to the general public.

Busana Muslim and the Creation of Moral Publics

Despite this initial prejudice and suspicion toward busana Muslim, the practice of veiling has now become very much a component of mainstream Indonesian society. Several provinces have instituted legislation based on Sharia law that requires Muslim women to wear a jilbab when in public (Rinaldo 2008:27). Furthermore, wearing the jilbab in school was once banned, but has become mandatory on Muslim university campuses, such as Universitas Islam Indonesia in Yogyakarta. Dressing in busana Muslim is now perceived to demonstrate the moral character of the community and individual. Conversely, not dressing in busana Muslim is believed to indicate a lack of moral character (Warburton 2008:2). Busana Muslim has thus become a symbol not only of Muslim identity and activism in Indonesia, but also of individual and social morality.

In contrast to Java's urban centers, the practice of dressing in busana Muslim is still essentially non-existent in rural Cen-
entral Java. This dichotomy in the practice of dressing in busana Muslim from urban to rural areas highlights that perceptions of morality and dress are not universal across Java. Nonetheless, in rural Central Java, state-appointed village midwives, often from urban areas or with urban training, dress in busana Muslim as a way to reaffirm their moral piety and religious knowledge when dealing with the morally contentious issue of birth control (Stein 2007:70). The ability of village midwives to effectively utilize busana Muslim to establish their own morality implies that the practice is not without meaning in rural areas.

Busana Muslim and Consumerism

The busana Muslim trend, however, is not popular for purely religious reasons. In the mid-1990’s, women began writing to magazine editors to demand that busana Muslim fashion be better represented in these publications. This lack of Islamic fashion coverage made the women feel left out of the national fashion scene (Jones 2007:223). The magazines quickly adapted to this consumer demand and even expanded the market for busana Muslim. Islam in Indonesia has become a symbol of elitism. It is seen as a path to social and financial success in a society that has become saturated with concern for self-improvement (Hasan 2005:229; Jones 2010:270). It is perhaps not surprising then that the busana Muslim trend has largely centered on middle and upper-middle class urban women (Hamdani 2007; Jones 2007:211). Popular fee-based seminars designed to educate women in respectable behavior emphasize that social and economic advancement has become increasingly influenced by personal fashion choices (Jones 2010:276). Busana Muslim has become an important component of that fashion landscape and therefore an important component of consumerism and social mobility.

The consumer aspects of busana Muslim trends, however, are not purely secular. In 2002, Muslimah magazine was founded with the goal to promote Islamic teaching through fashionable clothing. Before Muslimah, typically only adult married women dressed in busana Muslim. The magazine spread the trend of Islamic dress to teenagers by emphasizing that busana Muslim fashion can be ‘cute’ and ‘funky’ (Hamdani 2007:114-5). The consumer activity of purchasing (and selling) magazines and clothing in Indonesia has thus become framed as an issue of morality and religion.

Conclusions

The practice of veiling in Java, Indonesia has become seen as a both a religious and political act, as well as a consumer choice. These varying forces fueling the jilbab/si phenomenon in Indonesia have led it to take on multiple and seemingly contradictory symbolic meanings. However, the trend of busana Muslim in Java, Indonesia reveals that political activism and fashion are not necessarily distinct spheres of practice and meaning from religion.

REFERENCES CITED


Magazines geared towards fashion-conscious Muslim women and girls can now be found everywhere, such as Muslim Girl Magazine, which is published in the United States.

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