



A Critical Look at Universality in Diversity of the Mode of Dressing in Islam

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Abstract: This article examines and analyses how universality in diversity affects the ethics of dressing in Islam. The article discusses the basic rules and regulations of dressing within the Islamic framework. Relevant quotations from the Glorious Qur'an and <i>Hadith</i> of the Prophet (S.A.W) have been succinctly cited to buttress the argument of the article. The nature of universality in the diversity of the mode of dressing in Islam also received a critical examination. The article also sheds light on the unbecoming and negative attitude of some of Muslim sisters towards the etiquette of dress in Islam. Finally, a recommendation is made to the concerned authority and individuals to see to the proper adherence with the Islamic prescriptions on the mode of dressing.	Research Paper
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INTRODUCTION

Islam is a universal religion which aims at guiding mankind in all their life endeavours; spiritual, social, political and economic. The vital issue of dressing is one of the social aspects of human life which existed since the beginning of man. Dress has been counted as one of the bounties of Allah (S.W.T) to human beings serving two main purposes; for adornment and guarding human dignity in addition to protection for his body against discomfort of heat and cold. Allah (S.W.T) says:

O you children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness, that is the best. Such are among the signs of God, that they may receive admonition (Q 7:26).

Another paramount importance of dress could be seen in the case of Prophet Adam (A.S) and Eve. The Glorious Qur'an testifies that after having eaten from the forbidden tree, the first punishment they received, before their expulsion from paradise, was showing them their nakedness to each other. Allah (S.W.T) says:

...they both ate of the tree and so their nakedness appeared to them they began to sew together, for their covering, leafs from the Garden... (Q 20:121).

From the verse above, it can be perceived that the issue of attire occupies an important position in the

camp of Islam. Gibb and Krammers, (1979), observed that dress for mankind is one of the distinctive features which adds to their rank of humanity and differentiates them from other ordinary animals. It is against this background that Islam lays down general rules and regulations regarding the ethics of dressing, taking into consideration the diversification of human cultures, geographical locations and climatic conditions.

This article looks at the general enunciations of the religion of Islam concerning such diversifications as they affect universality in diversity of attire in the mode of dressing in Islam. It therefore starts with the definitions of the terms followed by the explanation of the dictates of Islam concerning apparels. The special attention accorded to women's dress to safeguard their chastity, modesty and morals has also been discussed. The article touches the disheartening scenario of moral bankruptcy in matters of dressing among female Muslims who are in the habit of imitating the indecent dressing style of the Western world which is incompatible with Islam.

The Meaning of Islam, Universality and Diversity

According to Abdalati, (2007), the word Islam is derived from the Arabic root "*Salam*" which means among other things, peace, purity, submission and obedience. Technically, the word Islam means submission to the will of Allah and obedience to His laws. The relationship between literal and religious meaning is strong and obvious. Only through obedience

to His law can one achieve true peace and enjoy lasting purity.

“Universal” which is the root word for “universality,” is defined by Hornby, as something done by or involving all the people in the world or in particular. Therefore, universality may take the meaning of the attitude of being everywhere. Hornby also defines diversity as a range of many people or things that are very different from each other, Hornby, (2000).

The term dressing is “an act or process of one who dresses” (online Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This simply means the mode of attire.

The Dictates of Islam on Universality in Diversity of the Mode of Dressing in Islam

As a global religion, Islam enshrines a universal etiquette of dressing taking into cognisance the natural diversification of people in their socio-economic, cultural aspects and indeed, the climatic conditions of their different settlements. All these differences are natural variations that are found in the world of reality. Hence, Islam recognises them as matters of fact and does not seek to wipe them out, but affirms that their advantage consists in affording the possible means of distinguishing one from the other. Allah (S.W.T) says:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you despise each other)... (Q. 49:13)

Commenting on the above verse, Ali (R.A) said that it was addressed to all mankind and not only to the Muslim brothers.

Meanwhile, looking at the geographical position of every country in the world’s Atlas, it can be admitted that climatic condition varies from one place to another. While some countries are described as tropical, where the temperature is very high in centigrade, others are called non-tropical where the degree of the temperature is low and that of cold is very high for example, the type of raiment or apparel used by those living in the cold areas like Iceland and Argentina in Southern America, cannot be appropriate for those living in Nigeria or Saudi Arabia who are under a severe scorching sun. The inhabitants of the former area must use woollen garments to shield themselves from the coldness, the type of which if used by the residents of the latter area will harm their health, the vice-versa is equally true.

Therefore, according to Hughes T. P *et al.*, (n.d), the main factor considered by Islam in man’s clothing and beautification is the principle of decency, chastity, modesty and manliness. Islam rejects anything in dressing and adornment which is not in harmony with the achievement, maintenance and improvement of these

qualities. Any clothing material and dressing manner which stimulates arrogance, false pride and vanity are strictly prohibited. For this reason, wearing silk and certain precious stones like Gold and Silver have been forbidden for males and allowed for females. The wisdom behind this prohibition lies in the fact that they are the things which suit the feminine gender alone. It was reported by Ali (R.A) from the Prophet (S.A.W) saying:

I saw the Prophet (S.A.W) with silk by his right hand and gold in his left hand and then he said these two things are forbidden for males among my *ummah*. (Abu Dawud, Hadith No.4, 0547)

Another universal rule of dressing which applies to the diverse nature of apparel is that one should not sew oversized clothes such as trousers and gowns which may be dragging on the ground out of pride. Abdullahi *bn Umar* (R.A) reported that Allah’s Messenger (S.A.W) said:

That who drags his garment in arrogance Allah will not look at him (with mercy) on the day of judgement, (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3465).

It is also part of the code of dressing in Islam that Muslim’s attire should properly cover his or her *awrah* (groin). For males, the *awrah* is from his navel to his knees whereas for women, the whole of her body excluding her face and palms (Abu Zaid, 2001: 39). In this regard, Islam permits a Muslim to wear any type of clothes as long as they conform to its prescription. Therefore, a Hausa Muslim who is accustomed to the wearing of a *Babbar riga* (Big gown) shirt and trousers in addition to a cap is legally approved by Islam, so also are Muslims from European Countries equally permitted to wear coats (suits) and trousers that suit their environments. The general regulation here is that any form of dress must cover one’s private part; both simple and complex.

Woman’s Dress in Islam

The attitude of Islam on women’s dress is such that of greater concern and more emphasised. This indeed, may not be unconnected, with their physiological nature which is quite different from their male folks. In the Glorious Qur’an, Allah (S.W.T) says:

And stay in your house and do (not dress) like that of the times of ignorance... (Qur’an, 33:33)

With this Divine commandment, Lemu, B. A and Heeren, H., (1976) asserted the dignity, honour, chastity and moral uprightness of Muslim women. Islam does not let women go loose or wander wide without any restrictions. It permits her the things, which are compatible with her nature, and, at the same time, cautions her against anything that might abuse or upset that nature. In his exegesis, al-Sa’adi, A. N., (2001), observes that divine instruction aims at protecting women from being exposed to dangers physically and

morally. To achieve these important goals, al-Kanadi A. B., (1990), enumerated seven conditions as outlined by Muslim jurists to be satisfied by every Muslim lady in her dress:

Firstly, her apparel must cover her entire body, excluding that which has been allowed for her as an exception to this general rule; (i.e. her face and two hands).

Secondly, the material from which the woman's dress is made must not be thin or delicate to display the body form or skin colour underneath.

Thirdly, the clothing must hang loosely on the body, and must not be tight-fitting such that it shows the shape and size of the limbs.

The fourth condition is that the garments must not have such bright colours or shiny materials that they can charm, and attract men's attention to them.

The sixth condition is that her attire must not resemble the clothes normally worn by disbelieving women.

The seventh condition is that her dress must not be ostentatious or showy, due to pride or worldliness, or to gain a reputation before people.

The foregoing conditions made a clear exposition of Islamic legislation regarding what constitutes acceptable dress for women within the *shari'ah*. The conditions are also laid down under the authority of the following verses:

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things) and protect their private parts (from legal sexual acts) and to not show off their adornment except only that which is apparent and to draw their veils all over their gowns and not reveal their adornment...(Q 24:31).

Oh! Prophet tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks all over their bodies (screen themselves completely except the eyes to see the way)... (Qur'an, 33:59)

Going by the teachings of these verses from the Glorious Qur'an, it appears to be a sacred duty of every Muslim to see that the women folk under his guide fulfilled these conditions in the mode of dressing. It is also the personal duty of every Muslim woman to guard her modesty and conceal her private adornments internally and externally from all those who are forbidden to see them.

Immoral Form of Dressing

At this juncture, a cursory look is cast at the unbecoming and immoral pattern of dressing exhibited by Muslim females in our modern time. It is unfortunate that despite all the beautiful Islamic etiquette of dressing, many female Muslims today (especially those in universities and other tertiary institutions) have intentionally abandoned it and adopted a fifthly and sinful "Western" dressing style.

Today, there is existence of series of fashion styles like; the mini dress, the "micro skirt", the "wet-look", "hot-pants", the "see-through", the "topless", "look at my thigh", "my breasts are ripe" "show me your back" and "my head is free" etc. All these forms of attire have been designed to portray and emphasise the intimate parts of a woman's body. And shamelessly enough, some female Muslim students are today parading on the streets in such kind of dress to be called civilized. Such category of Muslim ladies need to be reminded of the moral and spiritual effects of those forbidden modes of clothing, as reported from the luminous Messenger of Allah (S.W.T):

There will be found amongst the latter-day people of my nation (of Muslims) Women who are (Ostensibly) dressed, but (in reality) naked, their hair will be rolled in a bun at the tops of their heads like the camel's hump! Curse them, for verily they are cursed. (*Sahih Muslim, Hadith: 8903*).

It was also reported by Abu Hurairah who said:

Allah's Messenger cursed the man who wears attire which resembles women's clothing and cursed the women who wear garments resembling men's clothing (Abu Dawud, *Hadith: 4098*).

It can be discerned vividly that the so-called modern fashion of dressings are nothing short of the instigation of the devil (*Shaytan*) which can lead the affected person into eternal destruction. Therefore, Muslim women should be conscious of Allah (S.W.T) and desist from such dirty life that, they may receive the forgiveness of Allah (S.W.T) and His benevolence.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussions, the term, dress has been expounded in explicit clarity as something to cover one's body for two main purposes earlier mentioned, in addition to serving moral functions that are accorded to dressing which is amply stated in the Glorious Qur'an. The article also discusses the Islamic universal rulings regarding attire in the diverse nature of clothing among people. It emphasises that all cultural, geographical, and socio-economic differences of people in their dressing manner should comply with the Islamic etiquette of dressing.

The article also cited some Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W) showing the essence and moral significance of dressing. Moreover, the article touches on the issue of female Muslims dressing that; women must not roam about except in their proper coverings.

Finally, the article sheds light on the contemporary situation as it affects Muslim sisters in the matter of raiment. Under this item, the article observed that Muslim women have resorted to prohibited and immoral system of Western dressing, which brings out the sensitive parts of the body to exposure.

At this point, the article is appealing to the government, society, parents, guardians and lecturers/teachers to come to the rescue of Muslim women, daughters and sisters from this menace.

May Allah (S.W.T) endow us with the courage to wipe out the clutches of *Shaytan*, -Amin.

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