

Beyond the freedom vs oppression opposition : the meaning of the Londoner hijabista look

Marilia JARDIM

University for the Creative Arts, Centro de Pesquisas Sociosemióticas

Hijabista: slangy neologism used mainly on the internet, a union of *hijabi* and *fashionista*, referring to girls and women who use the headscarf and, at the same time, are fierce followers of Western Fashion trends. The term, on the one hand, manifests a union between the following of a religious code, manifested by the use of the headscarf and modesty in dress; and the affiliation to high street and designer style. Although that could appear to be a simple combination, a matter of personal taste or, perhaps, a cosmopolitan take on Islam, the style encloses a contradiction: it implies, as this analysis purposes to present, that Fashion is worn modestly; and the headscarf is worn fashionably – a conflict concerning both the principles of Islam and the purposes of Fashion.

Both objects involved in the analysis reclaim justification, especially when it comes to the semiotic study of dress, which is typically dismissed as a topic of minor academic importance. Nevertheless, the matter has been a lively subject in the works of Algirdas Julien Greimas – starting with *La Mode en 1830*, his PhD thesis, and reappearing in *De L'imperfection*, his last individual book – and many of his contemporaries and collaborators – Roland Barthes, *Système de la Mode*; Jean-Marie Floch, *Identités Visuelles*; Eric Landowski, *Présences de L'autre*; to mention a few. As in many of the above-indicated studies, this paper uses dress as a starting point, inviting the analysis to focus on broader issues this particular manifestation of London's 21st century street style seems to put on display: the effect of migrations, the attempt at an intersection of different identities, the struggles for staying unique in a global and globalised metropolis. Inside Semiotics and other Social Sciences, the study of dress has proven to be of capital importance, as clothing and the presentation of self continue to be a privileged space to apprehend the conciliation of the irreconcilable.

A complex operation of combining paradigms to compose dress, as described by Greimas in *De L'imperfection* (1987) but also remitting to the polemic contract which is part of the canonic theory (1993) to match headscarves with high street Fashion goes beyond a feminine daily ritual. It challenges not only the fundamental levels of both systems – can Fashion be modest? Can religion be fashionable? – but seems to compromise the black and white relations created between Fashion and Religion, as well as West and Middle East as anti-subject of each other.

What is the meaning, thus, of creating a form of dress that unites two manifestations which became emblematic of each one of those geographic locations, traditions, and cultures? From the 1970's onwards, the returning to veiling became a powerful symbol of the Islamic movements in the Middle East, bringing back the headscarf to unveiled societies as a visible sign of the Islamic faith and customs. (Ahmed 2011). Useless to say that, more or less at the same time, in the late 1980s, fast-fashion started to gain speed, with Fashion becoming one of the leading industries in the West, with its brands, trends, and ideologies spread across the globe. The same industry, in a proper capitalist manner, sees no distinction of gender, race, or creed, with leading European fashion houses catering to the wealthy Oil nations, designing special modest collections featuring headscarves and other religious garments. On the pinnacle of that struggle, London, one of the world's Fashion capitals of our days, sees Muslim girls and women trying to choose the best from each tradition to create a form of dress which, in the hopes of embracing both systems, seem to deny them both simultaneously.

Such a complex object became widely available to the mainstream audience in 2015 when H&M entered history as the first brand to feature a *hijabi* model in one of their campaigns. This one second – the approximate duration of the model Mariah Idrissi appearance in the video – is the main corpus of this work. Although such choice may seem fragile, when it comes to exemplifying a practice, the life those frames gained far beyond the original video justifies its pertinence as an object of study: in a campaign featuring other celebrities (such as rock legend Iggy Pop), and in the sea of H&M adverts appearing in the same period (including two videos dedicated to established celebrities, such as TV personality Kendall Jenner and former footballer David Beckham), Mariah Idrissi’s appearance made it to the headlines of papers all over the globe, with most articles featuring the image we chose to analyse. Secondly, whenever those articles discussed Idrissi’s appearance – and that includes anything from a fundamentalist Islamic perspective to xenophobe anti-Islam points of view – that image was the one served as the main course. The reiterations of that frame made that one second eternalised in the press and social media, converting it from individual choice to the emblem of a practice.

The chosen image will be described and analysed in its visual aspects, following the works of Jean Marie Floch on plastic semiotics. Appearing in Floch in the study of other bits of the Fashion system, the notion of *bricolage* from Claude Lévi-Strauss will be fundamental to this paper, as much as the Socio-semiotic works of Eric Landowski, mainly his writings examining the use and practice of objects (Landowski 2009). As the year invites us to honour the works of Algirdas Julien Greimas, this paper will focus his production relating to dress, especially *De L'imperfection*, as well as his detailed studies of the anti-subject, presented in *Du Sens II* and the *Dictionnaire*. Adopting a standard semiotic method, we will study the oppositions encountered in our object, and the extent to which the phenomenon observed in dress can be emblematic of social practices, reflecting how the composition of an appearance can provide visual manifestation of broader cultural contexts.

1. Fashion and Islam, subject and anti-subject

In the summer of 2015, the Swedish Fast Fashion giant Hennes & Mauritz launched a 1 minute 30 seconds video to their « Close the Loop » campaign, promoting the brand’s effort to encourage customers to recycle their unwanted clothes in store, in exchange for a £5.00 voucher. The video features dozens of different people, from various ages, sizes, genders, races, colours, ethnicities, faiths, famous and anonymous, while the voiceover prescribes formulas to break the established rules of dress. The ad closes with the sentence: « There are no rules in Fashion but one: Recycle your clothes ».



Figure 1. Mariah Idrissi models for H&M *Close the loop* campaign, in a performance lasting only one second¹.

¹ The few frames with Idrissi feature the long shot seen in this image and a face close-up. Idrissi poses in front of Peters & Co. Gin Palace at Broadway Market in East London, wearing an emblematic example of the street style

The big sensation behind the video, however, was undoubtedly the appearance of Mariah Idrissi (above), a British-Moroccan-Pakistani woman who became, at the occasion, the first model to wear a *hijab* in a Western fashion campaign. A quick search on the newspaper database *Nexis* returns fifty-six news articles in the period between 1st September and 31st December 2015 mentioning Idrissi and her appearance at H&M². The same period saw the launching of H&M campaigns, one featuring Kendall Jenner – which produced mere two mentions in the international press³ – and football legend David Beckham – appearing eleven times in the news of the same period⁴. Such result is remarkable, considering that unlike Jenner and Beckham, who are well-known celebrities starring one-minute videos exclusively dedicated to them, Idrissi was known only in social media, mainly among other Muslim girls and women who followed her accounts about Muslim beauty and fashion.

Besides breaking into the media for her one-second appearance in the video like no other participant in the same campaign did, it is important to stress that the image above was also featured in most articles mentioning Idrissi and H&M, and many more if we exclude H&M from the search. As such, what used to be one second in a 1'30" video became an eternalised frame, with repetitive appearances in news and social media to date (back to *Nexis*, Idrissi's appearances on news count three hundred fifteen, between 1st September 2015 and 27th October 2018), meaning likewise that a significant portion of the debate surrounding the mixing of *hijab* and fashion after the H&M video happened around that particular image. As such, it is possible to claim that single frame is an emblematic enough corpus to permit an insightful analysis of a practice, even if it refers to one person alone: one who was forced to count for all in the media discourse.

With her appearance paired with the voice-over « Look chic », she wears high-waist, wide-leg black culottes, a cream top, cream boots, oversized rose jacket, a simple black handbag, hands and wrists heavily accessorised with a golden wristwatch, bangles, and rings. The face features light makeup, with terracotta shades of blush and contour, and light pink sheen lipstick, complemented with oversized round sunglasses. Dressed like a typical Londoner for spring/summer 2015, the only detail separating Idrissi from other fashionistas is the *hijab*: a printed cream, burgundy and dark brown neckerchief, with a geometric print suggesting simultaneously a Middle Eastern pattern or a classic *pied de poule*, wrapped around her head and neck, playing the roles of both veil and scarf, modestly covering the head, or ostentatiously adorning the neck, falling through the chest and waist, adding print to the predominantly solid look.

Continuing, Idrissi is leaning against the jamb of a restaurant on the side of Peters & Co. Gin Palace, a popular location in Broadway Market – a hipster site in East London's Borough of Hackney. In the background of our model, a number of typically British elements catches the eye, even in the brief space of the frame: Union Jacks, the Gin Palace, the small pieces of paper advertising « small pie and mash £3.00 » – markers providing sufficient context to

this paper aims at analysing. Image: screenshot of the video « Close the Loop – Sustainable fashion through recycled clothes, » 0'55" from 2nd September 2015. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4xnyr2mCuI> (Last access: 17th November 2018).

² Nexis results page available at:

<https://www-nexis-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/search/homesubmitForm.do#0|BOOLEAN||||>
(last access 11/11/2018)

³ Nexis results page available at:

<https://www-nexis-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/search/homesubmitForm.do#0|1|BOOLEAN||||>
(last access 11/11/2018)

⁴ Nexis results page available at:

<https://www-nexis-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/search/homesubmitForm.do#0|1|BOOLEAN||||>
(last access 11/11/18)

confirm this scene happens in Britain or, more specifically, in London. In this carefully chosen location and staging, a British-born Moroccan-Pakistani woman wears a headscarf, leaning against a small restaurant, evoking the image of the small business and the immigrant – another powerful element of a Londoner identity.

A perfect emblem of Fashion in the cosmopolitan capital of the United Kingdom, no doubt, Maria Idrissi in those brief frames of an H&M ad is also an emblem of the slang *hijabista*. The look created for the video, although the work of a stylist, is not at all distant from the way Idrissi presents herself in her social media⁵, even before the sudden fame granted by her appearance. Her 84.8k Instagram followers⁶ receive many images of her looks, clothes and makeup: always very fashionable; always urban, on the streets, shopping; and always wearing the headscarf, which appears in different colours, folds, and styles, always a part of the look, rather than a mandatory item of religious dress. The idea of a combination of two worlds, thus, is suggested both in the video and in the model chosen to feature in it. From her personal story – a daughter of immigrants, mixed-race, British-born Muslim – to the way she chose to present herself, between the world of Fashion and the world of faith, the negotiation of two systems of value is present and manifest in her virtual persona.

In *De L'Imperfection*, Greimas addresses the act of dressing oneself as the conjunction of the pressures of nature, especially its social representation, and the pressures of culture (Greimas 1987). For the author, the matter of nature, or function, relates to issues of comfort, or the problems posed by the weather; while social pressures relate to a context to which a woman belongs, the environment and circumstances that woman will face. If in Western Fashion the second dimension, the one of society and culture, could be read as one context, in the image of oneself created by the *hijabista*, that dimension is split in half: one half which tries to cope with the appropriateness of the religious code of *hijab*; and the other attempting at responding to the Western ideas of beauty, style, newness, and respect to trends. In other words, when it comes to the specific look we are analysing, the social context cannot be perceived as one, especially because this « context » tries to conjoint two symbolic spaces which are opposed in their fundamental levels: the space of consumption, the sacred space.

Still in *De L'Imperfection*, Greimas addresses the desire to please the other, which is the foundation of the act of dressing, as an operation of *seduction*: the risky adaptation of the image a woman has of herself, and the one others will make of her. The same word is used by Landowski in *Les Interactions Risquées* to describe one of the four possibilities in the mechanism of manipulation: to seduce is to focus on the euphorisation of the manipulated subject with the view of making that subject want [*faire vouloir*] (Landowski 2005). Again, the word relates to the *image* the manipulator makes of the manipulated (id. p. 22), but also the image the manipulated has of oneself, or whether or not they are at the level of the positive simulacrum the manipulator attributes them. In the case we are presently analysing, the idea of image relates strongly to the concept of « presentation of self », meaning the aesthetical result is important: the final look, aiming at adorning the woman who wears it, creates an image of self which aims at aligning with the prevalent simulacra of beauty and appropriate curation of an appearance.

However, the same word will have a different use outside the scope of Standard and Socio-semiotics: in this risky combination between Fashion and Religion, *seduction* can have both euphoric and dysphoric values. For the Western system, to seduce seems to be the ultimate goal, both in the operations described by Greimas and in the regime of manipulation presented by Landowski, both concepts firmly rooted in the Fashion operations. For Islam, on the one other hand, seduction in both senses is something to be avoided: in fact, the idea of modesty

⁵ Her public account can be assessed at:

<https://www.instagram.com/mariahidrissi/?hl=en> (last access 12/11/2018)

⁶ 12/11/2018 count.

in dress, for both men and women as prescribed in the Qur'an⁷ relates to the need of preserving the decorum, and avoiding the incitement of *fitna* – a word for the chaos caused by unrestrained feminine sexuality, in one of its many meanings (Shirazi 2003).

No matter how clear that boundary could be for a modest wearer, it is important to remark that in the eyes of the West, the veils could be perceived as sex appeal, erotic fetish, or even something to instigate the sexual desire, rather than preventing it. Similarly, modesty includes, in the Qur'an, avoiding to display adornments⁸, which is an opposite operation to the one performed by Fashion, which encourages adornment to create/enhance beauty. Therefore, to merge both Islamic faith and Fashion in one look not only means to respond to two system of values with opposed views on what to do with adornments, but it also means a risky attempt at dealing with concepts – such as *seduction* – which are perceived as euphoric to one system, and dysphoric to the other.

Many authors studying the veil today are emphatic when it comes to its marked opposition to what is named a « Western way of life » or « Western decadence. » (Shirazi 2010) Well, aren't beauty and Fashion the epitome of such decadent way of life? The feminine discourse on the veil today is marked in that sense when it places itself in direct (and sometimes radical) opposition to the ideas of display of beauty, or the mere existence of beauty as a measurement of feminine worth. Fashion and consumerism appear as the same side of this coin, its denial emerging as a new form of feminine liberation (Tario 2005).

Taking the previous paragraphs into consideration, it becomes clear how a social narrative is outlined, in the best Standard Semiotics style, with both discourses adopting the role of the hero, and pointing the Other as the anti-subject. In Greimas, it is precisely in the ethnic literature that the opposition between subject and anti-subject is coded as a moralist dualism between good and evil (or positive and negative) (Greimas 1983) the same dualism re-utilised by the media in the addressing of Islam in the West, or the West and its Westerners in the Salafist Islamic ideology.

The dance between subject and anti-subject is further explained in the *Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* as the *polemic* [*polémique*]. In that work of Greimas and Courtés, it is suggested that the polemic relates to the social life as confrontation, which could be the competition between social classes, or the exchange and social cohesion (Greimas, Courtés, 1993). That describes precisely the point we are trying to expose, by observing the use of the solid (ecstatic?) opposition of subject and anti-subject, or the polemic structure, in the narratives of the social conflicts between the Secular West and the Islamic East. Greimas continues his analysis by mentioning that such a clear opposition is neither necessary nor general, especially when characters stop being exclusively good or evil, but located in the sub-contraries *deixis*. Back to the hijabista, in a historical moment when the dominant discourse continually tries to push the absolute opposition between East and West, the brief frames of Idrissi leaning against an emblematic London location create not a conjunction of contraries or complex term, but a contradictory meta-term, or neutral term.

2. Engineers and *bricoleurs*

Contradiction, rather than opposition, is the most appropriate word to describe what happens in the hijabista look: it is not an accumulation of opposed identities, but an operation of union in which the base opposition is diluted. By making Fashion modest, and modesty ostentatious, the resulting effect builds a relation of double denial (neither, nor) of the base opposition. Departing from a contrariety between Fashion – a term which stands for the West,

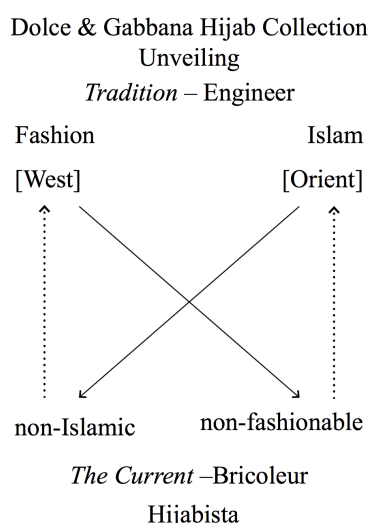
⁷ See the *surah Al-Nur*, 24:30 and 24:31, in which the Prophet addresses first men and then women to require modesty in the gaze and dress. Abdel Haleem (2004 222).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

and Islam – the Oriental or Middle Eastern term, we have two systems which manifest what Claude Lévi-Strauss named the *engineer* (1962). Fashion and Islam, when presented at their best, are the result of organised systems without limits when it comes to power, knowledge and means. Following Lévi-Strauss, the work of the engineer subordinates each task to the acquisition of tools and materials according to each project (*ibid.*, 27-29) which translates the position occupied by both Fashion and organised religion, especially today.

What Idrissi does – which is similar to the doing of every Muslim girl in London following this style – fails to comply with both systems. The manner in which religion and Fashion are used relates more closely to another concept borrowed from Lévi-Strauss: the *bricolage*. Opposed to the *engineer*, the *bricoleur* creates from scraps and residues of other projects, subscribing to a mentality in which things can always have a use. The weakness of *bricolage* – but also its poetry, according to the author – is that the result of the *bricoleur*'s doing is never what was planned, due to the limited possibilities and the barriers of what cannot be executed.

The operation executed by the hijabista, thus, transforms not only the meanings and values of the objects she chooses to compose her look – with neckerchiefs turned into headscarves, oversized lines used to disguise the silhouettes, and so forth – but the meanings and values belonging to the two original systems are also transfigured. On the one hand, the use of the objects belonging to Western Fashion in a « modest » manner results in the creation of a subcontrary term Non-Fashionable, with the repurposing of the items causing the loss of the ostentatious value originally intended by its creators. On the one other hand, the same occurs when the strict religious dress is recreated using non-sacred items, with the choices in dress appearing as Non-Islamic (as well as Non-Oriental, considering this happens in a Western country and using garments created within the Western Fashion system). The *hijabista*'s look, thus, unites not Fashion and Islam, but the Non-Islamic and Non-Fashionable terms, with a neutral term resulting.



What is done by the hijabista speaks very closely to another innovative manifestation belonging to the scope of Fashion, analysed by Jean-Marie Floch in *Identités Visuelles*: the Chanel Total Look (Floch 1995, 107-144). Following Floch's analysis, Coco Chanel's attempt at uniting opposing values – Classical and Baroque – results in the denial of both, with choices occupying the axis of subcontraries' rather than merging in a complex term. Following Lévi-Strauss, Floch proposes such visual identities are created by bricolage, an operation which he explained as « making new with the old ». When analysing the corset in

Fashion systems in my 2014 work, the category I proposed resulted in two meta terms, a complex term manifesting *tradition*, and a neutral manifesting *the current* (Jardin 2014). Looking at the analysis presented above, it is possible to see that the discoveries I presented then can be overlapped to the present analysis, in which the *engineered systems* – Fashion and Islam as an organised religion – can be named the axis of *tradition*, whereas the doings of the *bricoleur*, the hijabista, appear as the axis where *the current* is produced: a statement which recaps a long history of street styles as opposing the hegemony of the Fashion system, through the neutralisations of its traditional oppositions, especially those relating to class and gender.

To validate this proposition, we must consider that both Fashion and organised religion are heavily regulated systems, which dictate the expected behaviour of its followers strictly, even when their prescriptions aim at breaking their own established rules – and that includes the changes in Fashion as much as the many dress reforms Islam experienced throughout the Westernisation of Middle Eastern countries, or the different interpretations of the Qur'an co-existing within the religion. Which means that, if a complex term between Fashion and Islam was to be presented, it wouldn't be the fragile (and yet current) *bricolage* appearing in the hijabista style, but a manifestation incorporating the power, means, and knowledge of both Fashion and Religion: two possible examples would be the process of unveiling and adoption of Western dress happening in the late 19th- and early 20th-century in Middle Eastern countries; or the union *de facto* between Fashion and Religion presented by Dolce & Gabbana in their 2016 *Hijab Collection*, in which each item of dress is carefully crafted to serve the purposes of religious modesty. In both cases, the assimilation of each system is complete, successfully merging both terms in one, unsurprisingly, traditional manifestation, creating and reproducing a new tradition, or a new heavily regulated system responding to long-established rules.

The hijabista, on the contrary, not only creates the new – through the operation carefully described by Lévi-Strauss and Floch, where their identity is exposed by the materials they choose and the figures they evoke – but creates such by rejecting the rules of both systems simultaneously. In intention, perhaps the aim was to achieve the complex term, and a double relation of belonging, simultaneously subscribing to two opposing ideas. Unavoidably, in the attempt at reconciling the irreconcilable, a new value emerges, one resulting from the neutralisation of the tradition of both systems: mainly, the idea of Islam as Oriental and modest, and the idea of Fashion as Western and ostentatious.

What is observed in the responses to this form of identity provides colour to the semiotic analysis: both systems evoked in this look respond with scepticism, with religious peers believing the excessive use of Fashion is something harmful to the commandment of *hijab*, while, on the one other hand, the resistance to the term « Modest Fashion » implies the incompatibility of both words. Even if the hijabista is marking in her look the double affiliation to Fashion and Religion, both systems tend to resist in recognising this affiliation, at least in their traditional versions, which must belong as opposed terms in a base opposition.

The neutralisation of at least two oppositions – West vs Orient, Fashion vs Islam – can be gauged in most elements composing the look in the image. The trousers, for example, could be interpreted both as culottes, which became very fashionable in 2015, or a reference to the traditional Pakistani dress; the scarf chosen by the stylist to (re)create Idrissi's look possess prints evoking both Western and Oriental traditional prints, and its use relates both to the sacred covering of the head, or the profane use of scarves in Fashion; thus the modesty finds its way through the fashionable use of oversized lines, a mark of Western Fashion since the end of the 1970s; and the fashionable is created in the appropriation of elements belonging to the scope of the exotic, remitting to the vogue of Orientalism, inaugurated by Paul Poiret's

view of the Ballets Russes in the 1910s and his overall fascination with the East (Milbank 2005). Which is the correct order of influence, however, is impossible to determine.

Notwithstanding, it is possible to affirm that this style is *admired*, especially when compared to what is named traditional Islamic dress – terminology generally used in London in reference to the *niqab* or the *chador*. The careful blending with Fashion, thus, helps the secular Westerner to accept ideas considered disturbing, alien, irreconcilable with *our* way of life – another argument for our analysis identifying the *hijabista* with the denial of tradition. That goes hand in hand with a matter we discussed above, the opposition Subject vs Anti-subject which, today, appears as fixated, with the West and its way of life identified with the hero of the narrative. Through the neutralisation of fundamental values achieved in the look, the confrontation between West and East, as well as the one Freedom and Oppression no longer makes sense. Rather, the very domain of such oppositions is the one of *tradition*, the black-and-white distinctions relating to heavily regulated systems. The *bricolage* of the *hijabista*, on the one other hand, communicates current conceptions of hardened terms, updating the expressions and contents of Fashion and Religion, operating within the contradictions of what it means to be free, and what it means to be Middle Eastern today.

Although the meta-opposition between *traditional* and *current* appears as isotopic in my work and seems to resolve the analysis presented in this section, it is also pertinent to ask if the uproar about this appearance relates to beauty created by the look, versus our crystalised idea of the «.Muslimwoman ». For Greimas, the appearance of things has the virtue of allowing us to glimpse the possibility of something beyond the meaning. It is evident, in the object of this investigation, that such possibility relates to the generation of the aesthetic value, which is something that urges to be studied separately. Here, we relate this value to the surpassing of the *use* of headscarves, which we will analyse in detail in the next section.

3. The practice of Hijab, the practice of Fashion

At the end of his section discussing dress in *De L'imperfection*, Greimas leaves us with the problem of *use* and *usury*. The *use* will be defined by the author as a functional utilisation, which « (...) transforms sensible gestures in insignificance (...) » (Greimas 1987) whereas *usury* is what corrodes the moments one wishes to dedicate to what could be called « life », implying that the other things we do, the repetition of a routine, are something other than life. The overall conclusion is that the iterativity (or repetition) threatens to become the dominant dimension of life. By observing the analysis we presented so far, it is possible to read that the act of dress performed by the *hijabista* positions itself in the opposite direction of the *use*, at least in the sense Greimas attribute to the word: it is, perhaps, the exit presented by the author as what « life » is, and not iterativity of the same gestures, uses, routines.

Landowski revisits the theme of use versus practice in his paper *Avoir prise, donner prise*: similarly to Greimas, he will define *use* as the utilitarian utilisation of something, according to the « correct » manner of doing so (Landowski 2009). In the context of our object, it is possible to say that the correct use of a headscarf is one according to the commandment of the Qur'an, preserving the charms, hiding the beauty or the person: a modest use. Fashion, likewise, has a correct use, one which will respond to its regulations relating to the rhythm of changes it imposes, as well as with the ideas of body and presentations of self created within its system – even when those predominant ideas appear as the denial of previous rules. What happens, however, when the ostentatious use of a headscarf, as we have been discussing throughout this work, is introduced? Or when the Fashion system is blended with codes of modesty, and items of dress considered as costume, instead of fashion?

Many strict Muslims will claim that the fashionable use of *hijab* doesn't observe *hijab* – the word in its correct use, not meaning « the headscarf » but the moral conduct related to the head covering. Another possible claim is that the headscarf use made by women who dress hyper fashionably is « not correct » precisely because it surpasses the expected use of a headscarf. Likewise, and as previously mentioned, the terminology « Modest Fashion » is rejected in the West, where it is preferred to use « dress » or « wear » to refer to the type of clothing coping with religious codes. The manifestation analysed in this work, thus, seems to belong to the domain of what Landowski defines as *practice*: not only the repetition of the use with the view of perfecting the performance but the use in which the object is perceived as a partner which inter-acts with the performing subject.

In such relation, it is not the object (or the performing subject) who possesses the aesthetic value: it is in the union between the performing subject and the object-partner, and in the elevation of such practice, that the surplus of meaning is generated. For Landowski, the performer who develops the performance *with* an object to such level becomes the *virtuoso*, someone whose practice of an object surpasses the utilitarian utilisation of the same object to then invest it with aesthetic value. If we adopt this reasoning, it is possible to say the hijabista becomes twice a virtuoso: she is a connoisseur of both Fashion and Islam, performing in the edge of both systems. Her practice of both Fashion and *hijab* is admirable and full of aesthetic value precisely due to the mastery with which she combines elements belonging to both traditions, twisting the meanings of both. As a result, a new meaning is added to the one of fashionability and religious piety: a modest beauty, or perhaps, the beauty in modesty.

In this manner of dressing, the meanings of Fashion, and Islam and its commandments, are slowly stretched and (re)constructed in act, with new functions discovered in the object beyond its expected use. The line between one system and the other is challenged and, simultaneously, opposing and contradictory values are freely appropriated and rewritten: between flaunting and clouding, the meanings of clothing are *practised*, instead of *used*, to both accommodate and challenge established ideas about fashionability and religious piety.

Back to the beginning, Landowski himself evokes the importance of seeing beyond oppositions. The author remembers us, for example, that even if dichotomies are useful, they aren't definitive. That can lead us back to the problem of subject and anti-subject, which could be interchangeable, depending on the point of view adopted in the narrative. Or perhaps, we could recap Landowski himself in *Presenças do Outro*, where the idea of alterity is dismembered in several possibilities, beyond the opposition between one and the Other (Landowski 2012).

In that text, the author explores that, although every subject seems to need a *he* which is imagined as distant and foreigner, so that the *I* can be constructed by difference, there are no given borders between us and the Other, even though the dominant discourses insist in pushing such solid oppositions as definitive truths. Back to Idrissi, it is evident the effort of H&M in stating the lack of borders between West and Orient, not only through the composition of the look but the general staging of the scene. Throughout the sequence, the idea of union is pushed, rather than the separation.

As such, perhaps what is done by Idrissi in her look, and then validated and reproduced by H&M in their campaign, could be read as the *practice of Fashion* as well, opposed to its use. Under that light, it's not only the religious values which are being hijacked and bent but also the values and meanings of Fashion. Just like the neutralisation of both systems – Fashion and organised Religion – seemed to reverberate as neutralisation of a Subject vs Anti-subject opposition, here too the practice of Fashion and Hijab reverberate in the denial of the *use* of other values, such as nationality, ethnicity, and race.

The creation of this look denies the oppositions, or the *negotiations* surrounding the delicate relations between East and West. Rather than explicitly attempting at mediating the not always peaceful ties between East and West, the hijabista evokes both values and many more, making their union the value, rather than a strategic (perhaps engineered?) combination between both. Through the adjusted practice between the performer, Fashion, and Islam, the result is the *esthetic* union of both elements, both contexts, both traditions, and the emergence of a new aesthetic value arising from the act of union, and not from economic transactions of objects of value.

Our investigation started from a commonplace opposition when the issue of women and Islam is debated: the matter of « freedom versus oppression », followed by the idea that each term can be homologated to the Secular West or the Middle Eastern culture and custom. The manifestation we chose to analyse, on the contrary, challenges another opposition which unfolds from the first, one between Fashion and the Islamic religion which, as we hope to have argued, is neutralised through the performance of the hijabista who, like the Lévi-Strauss' *bricoleur*, creates the new with the old.

The static values from the base opposition – Freedom vs Oppression, but also West vs Islam, Fashion vs Religion, Subject vs Anti-subject – belong to an axis of *tradition*, which is reproduced through what we called, following Lévi-Strauss, *engineered systems*: the ones with means and materials to develop their projects with precision, which is the case of both Fashion as a system and an industry, and organised religion. The street style we analysed, on the one other hand, is formed through the *bricolage* of both systems, a process which causes the bending of the original uses of objects and meanings, thus creating *the current* as a meta-opposed neutral term.

Expanding from those concepts, it is possible to gauge that the neutralisation of the values of Fashion and religion in the look, which are replaced by the contradictory non-Fashionable and non-Islamic uses of objects, culminates in the neutralisation of other oppositions as well, which includes the idea of Subject vs Anti-subject from the fantastic tale analysed by Greimas, which seems out of place in this visual identity.

Between villains and heroes, the form of presenting oneself we analysed in this paper introduces forms of composing an appearance which denies the utilitarian use of objects, privileging their *practice* instead. Such practice, used in the sense Landowski attributes to it, happens throughout the elements in the look, from « hijab » as a name-of-use, to the manner in which Fashion is used religiously, and the religious requirements are used fashionably. According to the author, it is in the practice that meaning is created: through freely practising all the elements of her dress, the hijabista becomes the virtuoso, capable of adjusting both the values from Fashion and Religion, a performance which is then validated and reproduced by a giant in Fast-fashion retail, which makes us question how long the traditional values of the industry will be able to survive in the 21st-century.

When Fashion becomes *modest*, and piety becomes *trendy*, both Fashion and Islam are challenged, inviting the one who apprehends this look to reconsider the meanings of objects inside and outside their own systems, as well as what they can mean in the eyes of the Other. Beyond the ecstatic opposition « freedom versus oppression », understood as a solid binary West vs Islam reoperated in the moralising « good vs evil » observed by Greimas, we find the aesthetic axiology as the agent revealing the freedoms of Islam and the oppressions of the West, without, however, completely reversing the original meanings of both systems. Would it then be possible to argue that the dilution of so many oppositions could be the path to the

dilution of Otherness? That this form of dress brings the Other closer to us, by exposing the fragility of *tradition*, versus the poetry of the *current* which is born from a bricolage?

What is possible to state, from now, is that the performance of the hijabista exists in the fine line between one and the Other, a performance which, attempting at conjoining Fashion and Faith without compromising none, results in the compromise of both. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny that is precisely in the risk of such performance that the aesthetic value is allowed to emerge. In Greimas' aesthetic accident, the hijabista lives away from the mere practical use of an object, or the usury of repetition, showing through the composition of her dress the *échappatoire*, the exit to her portion of the lived life.

References

- AHMED, Leila (2011), *A Quiet Revolution. The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* New Haven and London, Yale University Press.
- FLOCH, Jean-Marie (1995), *Identités visuelles*, Paris, PUF.
- GREIMAS, Algirdas-Julien (1987), *De L'Imperfection*, Perigueux, Pierre Fanlac.
- (1983), *Du Sens II. Essais Sémiotiques*, Paris, Seuil.
- et COURTÉS, Joseph (1993), *Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, Paris, Hachette.
- et FONTANILLE, Jacques (1991), *Sémiotique des passions. Des états de choses aux états d'âme*, Paris, Seuil.
- HALEEM, Abdel, M. A. S. *The Qur'an. A new translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- JARDIM, Marília (2014), *O Corset na Moda Ocidental: um estudo sociosemiótico sobre a constrição do torso feminino do século, XVIII ao XXI*, São Paulo.
- LANDOWSKI, Eric (2006), *Les interactions risquées*, Limoges, Pulim.
- (2009), « Avoir prise, donner prise », *Actes Sémiotiques*, 112.
- (2012), *Presenças do Outro*, São Paulo, Perspectiva.
- LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude (1962), *La Pensée Sauvage*, Paris, Plon.
- MILBANK, Caroline Rennolds (2005), « Poiret, Paul », *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, organised by Valerie Steele, New York, Scribner.
- NEXIS results page available at:
- <https://www-nexis-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/search/homesubmitForm.do#0|BOOLEAN|||||>
(last access 11/11/2018)
- <https://www-nexis-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/search/homesubmitForm.do#0|1|BOOLEAN|||||>
(last access 11/11/2018)
- <https://www-nexis-com.ucreative.idm.oclc.org/search/homesubmitForm.do#0|1|BOOLEAN|||||>
(last access 11/11/18)
- Her public account can be assessed at: <https://www.instagram.com/mariahidrissi/?hl=en>
(last access 12/11/2018)
- SHIRAZI, Faegheh (2003), *The veil unveiled: the hijab in modern culture*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida.
- *The veil unveiled, op. cit.* and TARLO, Emma. *Visibly Muslim: fashion, politics, faith*, (2010), Oxford, Berg.
- TARLO, Emma and Robert, Na'ima B. (2005), *From my sisters' lips*, London, Bantam.