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Beauty in the Zongo: women negotiating religious co-existence in Accra's urban area of Madina

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CHAPTER THREE

Beauty and Piety: Cross-Religious Borrowing of Veiling Practices[109]

Introduction

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I stated that beauty is multi-dimensional; it includes the physical, spiritual/religious, ethical and erotic. The discussion so far has touched on the physical, spiritual and to some extent erotic dimensions of women's beauty practices, with specific focus on marriage, bridal beauty practices and the beauty parlour as a potentially dangerous but also inter-religious space where women go to make themselves beautiful. With regard to these dimensions, I have provided insights into how various levels of gender and inter-religious relationship manifest. For a deeper understanding of inter-religious relationships from a gendered perspective, this chapter and the next one pay attention to specific beauty practices of Muslim and Christian women that provide insights into complex negotiations in a multi-religious context, these practices being religious/spiritual and erotic.

In this chapter, I focus on the religious/spiritual dimension (even though I have discussed them briefly in the previous chapters) of beauty with a specific focus on veiling practices. I suggest that a focus on veiling offers a lens into very complex forms of negotiations and transformations about women's bodies from the gendered and inter-religious perspectives. I state that beauty is not just about the aesthetics, because gender relations and religious perspectives strongly influence how women beautify themselves in Madina. I have shown that an interlocutor argued:

> For the first time it feels good to be a *niqab* (face veil) observer in Madina Zongo. Some of our Muslim sisters are beginning to use it due to the outbreak of the coronavirus. I have started making *niqabs* for sale, and some Christian women have expressed interest in using it. I think the outbreak of coronavirus is a blessing in disguise (Khamis 2021:1).

[109] Parts of this chapter have been collected in the form of text and photographs from earlier publications (see Khamis 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2024) and incorporated.

These are the statements of a woman who belongs to the *tabligh*[110] group in Madina. This woman described how before the COVID-19 pandemic, some Muslims and non-Muslims in the Zongo passed offensive comments on her *niqab* (face veil) any time she was in public (Khamis 220121). She was identified as 'Boko Haram', 'Al-Shabab', or 'Al-Qaeeda', connecting her *niqab* to the activities of Islamic reformist groups across the world (Khamis 2021). I argued that: 'However, COVID-19 transformed the attitude of many Zongo residents to the *niqab*; they began to consider it as a protective piece of cloth likely to prevent the spread of the disease' (Khamis 2021:2).

There are several scholarly works on the multiple meanings of Muslim women's veiling practices in various societies across the world. These works largely discuss veiling from the gendered, religious and secular perspectives, which indicates that to appreciate the veiling practices of Muslim women across the world, individuals should situate the practice in its proper context. In France, the Netherlands and Belgium, for instance, Muslim women adhering to veiling practices, be it the *niqab* or the *hijab*, is perceived as a practice that challenges secular ideologies about restricting religion to the private space (Mahmood 2005; Asad 2006; Moors 2009; Ahmed 2011; Fadil 2011; Burchardt 2020). In these societies, Muslim women who insist on wearing their veils in public spaces despite the ban are seen as rebellious or religious fanatics, whose beauty practices may affect their opportunities of getting employed in the public sector. Yet, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Niger and even northern Nigeria (Mahdi 2009; Masquelier 2009; Ahmed 2011), the presence of women's veils in public is portrayed as an expression of their agency, their autonomy to move beyond the boundaries of the private space into the public space, which hitherto was occupied by men. For these women, veiling is far from ideas about the Muslim women portrayed as wearing a piece of cloth forced on them by men, such that they are seen as oppressed, fundamentalists and subordinated; rather, it allows them the freedom to show up in public spaces as well as mix religious dress practices and fashion in very fascinating ways.

Fair (2013), for instance, argues that due to the unlimited aesthetics incorporated in designing the *niqab*, women who wear it in Zanzibar are now associated with modernity and cosmopolitanism. Similarly, in the Netherlands, Moors (2009: 176) explains that beholders may perceive the veiling practices of Muslim women as merely religious apparel, yet their veils display varieties of fashion, including materials used, styles of wrapping and pinning. Moors (pp. 177–178) therefore proposes the idea of 'Islamic fashion' as an inclusive approach towards fashion. Rather than taking Western countries as the main or only originators of fashion, Moors proposes the inclusion of Global South

[110] A transnational Islamic missionary movement which originated from India (See Janson, 2016 on Male Wives Female Husbands: Reconfiguring Gender in the Tablighi Jamat in the Gambia)

locations such as Dubai, Cairo, Kuala Lumpur, Darkar, Beirut and Jakarta also as pacesetters of fashion—and, in our case, we consider Madina Zongo. Again, Moors' understanding of Islamic fashion broadly includes what people wear every day, including clothing and accessories advertised online, rather than limiting fashion to runway and design contests.

This chapter takes inspiration from Moors' idea of Islamic fashion, since I argue that in an attempt to appear beautiful and pious in public spaces, Muslim and Christian women continue to blur the boundaries between beauty and piety through their everyday veiling practices. Again, most Muslim women in the Zongo seem to mix sartorial inspiration from the Global South with local veiling styles, portraying their veiling practices as Zongo cosmopolitanism. In addition to mixing beauty with piety, this chapter argues that some Muslim and Christian women in the Zongo have borrowed certain veiling practices for very pragmatic reasons.

To answer the question of how women are negotiating beauty and piety in their veiling practices, I will first look at the broader background of modesty as a religious practice for Muslim and Christian women in Madina Zongo. This will be followed by a historical trajectory of different veiling practices in the Zongo and how they evolved overtime from *duku, mayafi, hijab* and *niqab*. In discussing these types of veiling practices, I will highlight the national debates over the *hijab* and secularism in Ghana and how this impact everyday practices in some of the formal public spaces in Madina Zongo. The subsequent discussion focuses on veiling as a beauty practice for all Muslim women and for some Christian women in the Zongo; and lastly, I look at the cross-religious borrowing of veiling practices by both Muslims and Christians for physical (such as COVID-19) and spiritual protective purposes.

Religion and Modesty

Modesty is a concept that applies to the dress practices of both Muslim and Christian women. Hass and Lutek (2019) and Hoel (2013) use the Islamic concept of *awra* to describe modesty, adding that even though modesty applies to both gender, it is used mostly as a gendered construction. According to Hoel (2013: 31–32), the gendered construction of modesty sexualizes the female body, instructing women to cover their bodies and guard their speech in a manner that does not prevent men's spiritual development. A woman who dresses modestly is identified as a respectable and responsible woman, even though this may not always be the case. Some interlocutors revealed that one of the reasons women's modesty is noted as more elaborate than that of men is because, in Ghana, religion and

culture often position women as bearers and transmitters of tradition and cultural values, since they are traditionally responsible for nurturing children[111] (also see Spronk 2007: 6).

Additionally, discussions among both Muslims and Christians revealed that there is a general perception regarding the potential danger of the female body (Sackey 2003; Allman 2004), especially if it is naked or when certain parts of it are exposed in public except for the purposes of puberty rites. This is why for members of the Deeper Life Church, women, even though required to cover their hair and dress modestly, are not allowed to sit in the first row during church services, where the male preacher is likely to have direct contact with them.[112] Also, at the International Central Gospel Church, even though the church does not explicitly emphasize modest dressing, ushers have been trained to allocate back seats to women who attend church with sexually provocative dresses[113] (also see De Witte 2011).

Again, some Muslim men at the *Allah Rufa Asiri* base have explained how the presence of brides in the mosque during the officiation of Muslim weddings force them to employ 'techniques of inattention' (Larkin 2014) in order not to divert their attention in the mosque. These men revealed that even though the dresses of brides often cover their entire bodies, and even with the veils, the fact that it is form-fitting and reveals the contours of the woman's body cause them a lot of discomfort in the mosque. The discomfort about women's bodies in sacred places such as the mosque is reiterated by one of the ASWAJ imams Sheikh Abdul Razak Iddriss Alhassan in a viral Facebook video.[114] The sheikh explained that the practices of bringing a bride and her groom to the mosque during the officiation of their marriage is against the Sunnah of the Prophet, because during the officiation of the marriage between Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet and his cousin Ali, none of them was present at the mosque. To quote the Sheikh:

> [Y]ou will see that the bride and her groom are brought before imams and chiefs and you will see her breasts. Everyone will be looking at her; all the imams and chiefs will be looking at her. Let us fear God. This is not Sunnah; we should not sit and allow this practice to go on. Let us not behave like non-Muslims.

[111] Interview with Mama Fati, 25 December 2021, at Madina Libya Quarters.
[112] Interview with Sister Deborah, 28 December 2021, a member of the Deeper Life Church in Madina.
[113] Interview with sister Ama, 23 November 2022, a member of the International Central Gospel Church who operates a beauty shop in Madina.
[114] http://www.facebook.com/share/v/1EYgpFiS1/ Accessed 1 November 2024

Obviously, brides do not enter the mosque in dresses that expose their breasts; however, the sheikh means that the dress worn by the bride is so close-fitting that it exposes the shape of the woman's breasts. Men who sit at the base, and sheikh seem to echo the voices of some Muslim men in the Zongo about the effect of women's bodies regarding the men's spiritual development, as we see the sheikh calling on the Muslim community to go back to what he refers to as 'pure' or authentic Islam and eschew all forms of innovation and imitation from the religious 'other', in this case Christians[115]. But in a religiously pluralistic setting like Madina, the encounter with and exposure to the 'other' is inevitable; individuals, through daily encounters, copy and imitate the 'other' for pragmatic reasons. Some of the Muslim women have argued that their presence in the mosque allows them to listen to the pieces of advice—that is, to a form of pre-marital counselling given by the imams, chiefs and all opinion leaders present at the wedding.

As I have indicated in Khamis (2022) that in Madina Zongo, perceptions about the danger of women's bodies are transferred into the consumption of global beauty commodities such as female dummies used by beauty parlour owners or those who operate clothing boutiques. Like dolls (Manelay 2007; Frederiks 2017), these dummies have been designed with attractive features to stimulate the senses of customers. Even though the female dummies are primarily produced for commercial and aesthetic functions, they assume different biographies as they are transported from their places of production to other places. The images of female dummies are invested with ethical meanings, making them also dangerous. In this case, the female dummy is not merely an ordinary object used for displaying some trendy fashion; its use is inspired by religious and ethical understanding of the woman's body as sexually dangerous.

For instance, at the main entrance of 'Khairia's Glamorous Beauty Parlour' (see picture below), along the Madina Libya Quarters Road, is a female dummy dressed in a pair of jeans, with a piece of cloth hiding her breasts, beads across her shoulders, anklets on both legs and some strings of belly beads. The features of the dummy—large breasts and broad hips—is similar to the features often portrayed by global fashion consumers as a requirement for an ideal, beautiful woman in the West (Manelay 2007: 216–217). As I have stated earlier, a Muslim beautician stressed that, it is important to respect the values regarding modesty of the female body when advertising one's beauty skills to the general public (see Khamis 2022). Again, I argued that even though dummies are just objects, they have the capacity to seduce men who encounter it. This idea about the sexualized

[115] It is widely known in the Zongo that it is a Christian practice to have the bride and the groom present at the officiation of their marriage.

female dummy in the Zongo was also corroborated by another Muslim woman who owns a clothing boutique, called 'Kubash Collections', she recalled how a group of men at a base near her shop took offence after she had forgetfully left naked female dummy in front of her shop. Asking her to dress the dummy since they were in Ramadan and observing their fast. On the other side, unlike their Muslim counterparts, Christian beauticians' attitude towards naked female dummies is also connected to respect for the woman's body as a source of life. A Christian beautician retorted that since the physical features of a woman's body play important roles in reproduction, it is unethical to allow any form of naked representation. This is the reason why even mad women are not allowed to walk about naked, while the case is different for mad men.

Fig. 3.1, A female dummy positioned at the main entrance Khairia's Glamorous Beauty Parlour. Photo by author.

To avoid tensions and dangers associated with the female body, religious practitioners maintain that women must dress in a manner that fits the religious requirement of female modesty. Meanwhile, some African feminists, including Tamale (2016: 84), have strongly opposed perceptions about the commodification and sexualization of the woman's body. She accused Islam and Christianity of making women's bodies a battleground for moral control. Tamale accused

religion and colonialism for connecting women's bodies to men's sexual immorality, adding that in a typical African rural setting, women went about their daily activities half naked and with no one sexualizing their bodies. Elsewhere, Allman (2004) and Rukundo (2016: 54–55) have described the sexualization of the female body as a post-colonial agenda attributed to the activities of European administrators and missions, as well as influence from the Middle East (Allman 2004; Rukundo 2016: 54–55). For me, such religious prescriptions raise questions about gender and the sexualization of the female body, and about how sexuality has become highly problematized in the Zongo and Ghana as a whole. This may partly be linked to transnational conservative ideologies about the female body and how such ideologies have impacted local ideas, in this case in Madina Zongo.

Some young Muslim women in Madina have questioned why modesty or the visible display of one's piety through dress is given priority over belief and character. In my discussion with some of these women in their twenties and early thirties, they expressed their discontent about the connection between piety and modest dressing in Madina. A beauty parlour apprentice mentioned that she is always criticized for not wearing a head cover; some people doubt if she prays and often express their astonishment when they see her performing ablution in front of her madam's salon. During the discussion, one of the ladies said: 'Those of us who do not wear *hijab* only have a boyfriend, but see those who wear the big *hijab*s; some of them have two, three, four and sometimes even five boyfriends.' For this lady, piety is not about the outward appearance of an individual; it has a lot to do with one's relationship with God. Some of the younger generation believe that piety is interior and a private affair that should not be linked to modesty. Seduction is not merely a matter of female dress style; it also involves the one who is seduced.

Among Christians and Muslims in Madina, there is a strong view about the morality of public appearance that women must always consider when they dress. Since dressing is an expression of both inner and outer beauty, women take to certain dress styles as a manifestation of their duty to a specific religious group and as conformity to social norms. This is related to the general understanding by Muslims and Christians concerning the possible danger of women's bodies. Therefore, even though Muslim and Christian women try to look good, they equally are conscious of the tensions their beauty practices are likely to create in the public space. Women are expected by cultural and religious prerogatives to cover their bodies in public, in order that they do not arouse men sexually. Religion and culture emphasize that apart from the female sex organs, the breasts, thighs, navels and other parts of the female body considered private should not be exposed in public. Some Christians in favour of this view refer, for instance, to Deuteronomy 22:5, where it is stated

that the woman shall not wear that which pertains unto a man and vice versa;[116] and some Muslim preachers often refer to the hadith that states that God has cursed and would send to hell women who are dressed in sexually provocative outfits. For many Muslims and Christians in Madina, there is a direct relationship between women's modest, beauty practices and piety.

Next to policing of women's bodies is the general belief among some Muslims and Christians in the Zongo that veiling achieves protection against demonic spirits. But before this discussion, I will first focus on the different veiling practices in Ghana.

Trajectories of Women's Veiling Practices in Ghana

Veiling is an important aspect of the beauty practices of Ghanaian women from different ethnic groups. Traditionally, it was primarily used as protection from the sun but has currently evolved into an important and accepted aspect of most Ghanaian women's dress practices. Various dress practices of Ghanaian women from the southern, middle and northern belts involve different types of veiling. In Ghana, the month of March is observed as heritage month, during which Ghanaians are encouraged to showcase their culture and tradition through music, dance, dress and food.[117] The visuals of the heritage month's celebrations indicate that some of the beauty practices of women are associated with different kinds of head covering.

Even though, currently, head covering may be described as a predominantly gendered beauty practice in Ghana, in Europe both men and women practised forms of veiling until the 20th century. In colonial Ghana, men also wore European hats as a symbol of modernity and civilization, as the practice was associated with British colonial identity. This practice continued until the 1950s, when many men had their 'hats off to Nkrumah' (Allman 2004) as a marker of citizenship and national unity. This was in solidarity with the values Kwame Nkrumah stood for. Several Ghanaian men adopted Nkrumah's hairstyle and removed their hats. Now many wear hats again, for reasons of fashion and for protection against the sun.

However, to date, men from the Volta and Northern regions of Ghana use a special kind of hat in different styles to suit specific occasions. Chiefs from southern Ghana such as the Ewes (for an example, see Fig. 3.2) wear a hat made from *kente* cloth, while those from northern Ghana wear a

[116] Quoted by Bro. David, a member of the Deeper Life Church in Madina, interviewed on 3 January 2022.
[117] https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/entertainment/gbc-to-launch-2023-heritage-month-at-broadcasting-house-in-accra/2023/ accessed 25 March 2023

smock hat. The meanings of the styles of the hats are based on their positions on a person's head. For example, wearing the smock hat upright at a ceremony signifies authority over all those present. This position of the smock hat is mostly worn by a paramount chief during gatherings; any sub-chief who wears his hat in that position would be flouting the traditional rules and seen as disrespectful to the paramount chief.[118]

Fig. 3.2, A scene from a heritage month celebration on Ghana Television. Photo retrieved from https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/features/gtv-breakfast-style/2022/ accessed 30 March 2023.

The preceding discussion indicates that, historically, head covering was associated not only with women's beauty practices, but also with men . Again, the practice of veiling among men is associated not only with Ghanaians but also with Tuareg men, who practise both head veiling and face veiling (Rasmussen 2013: 41). This chapter pays particular attention to women's veiling practices, because veiling is associated with female modesty and piety. This being so, I situate women's veiling practices in Madina within the local and global context, where veiling is influenced not only by the multi-ethnic groups who interact with one another in Madina, but also by a

[118]https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/People-Places-Why-Northern-Fugu-hats-are-worn-in-a-special-position-733008 Accessed 25 March 2023

geopolitical context where there are influences from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan and Turkey, all promoting a particular type of dress style for women. I use the term 'biography' in relation to Kopytoff's (1986) notion of the 'social life of things', because it offers an interesting perspective on the circulation of veiling as a commodity circulating from one context to another. Kopytoff suggests that in the process of circulation, things assume new meanings, which are different from what they were before. This being so, I discuss the shift of meanings as veils move from a particular social context to an other context, particularly in the religious and fashion domains. In the following, I will discuss four main veiling styles practised among Muslim and Christian women: *duku*, *mayafi, hijab* and *niqab*.

Duku

Duku is the Ghanaian term for a type of veiling associated with women in different parts of Africa. It is similar to what the south-western Nigerians call *gele*. Rules of respectability prescribe that older women cover their heads with *duku* when in public (Prempeh 2020). As I have indicated in Khamis (2021), *duku* as a veiling practice predates the introduction of Islam and Christianity to Ghana. *Duku* is part of the traditional *kaba* and slit dress worn by most Ghanaian women irrespective of their ethnic affiliation. There are two types of communicative meanings surrounding *duku*: the material/colour, and the manner in which the *duku* is tied. For elderly women, *duku* signifies maturity; a newly married Muslim woman in Madina uses a special type of colourful *duku;* and during funerals, a non-Muslim woman uses a black *duku* to cover her head as a sign of mourning. Covering the head is a mark of seniority; women were also required to cover their heads before speaking to kings.

I argued that *duku* is instrumental in expressing women's identity and mood at a given occasion. It was a visible dress practice through which women related with their spouses, co-wives, friends and relatives. Depending on how the knot of a *duku* is tied—in front, to the right or left side, middle or behind the head—it signals a message in social relations. In a typical traditional setting where polygyny is practised, women made statements to co-wives with their *duku* styles. A woman who shares the same compound with her rival(s) will normally use her *duku* to communicate her

feelings and thoughts to her(them). She does not assault her rival verbally or physically; rather, she resorts to a particular *duku* style to convey her feelings.[119]

Even though the meanings attached to these *duku* styles may not necessarily apply currently due to modernization and its related factors, like any other dress practice *duku* was a type of body modification through which women expressed their love, discontent or respect to each other. This means that *duku* goes beyond the mere act of covering the hair; it is symbolic and functional in relation to how and where it is donned. For example, among the Ga, there are head coverings with styles such as *onye otsu onye oye* (if you don't work, you will not eat) [120], *baakwe ne oya ta* (come and see and go and gossip)[121] and *keemo mi fee* (tell me everything),[122] while the Akan also use head coverings called *me ba woabrochire* (my child is living abroad),[123] *hyiame wo nkwa nta* (let's meet at the crossroad)[124] and *wodaso bo* (you are still using it).[125] Even though some of these *duku* styles have re-emerged in the beauty practices of Ghanaian women, the above meanings no longer apply to the various styles; rather, these styles are recognized more as fashion than as anything else. In Madina, *duku* is the most common veiling practice for both Muslims and Christians. It comes in either a square shape of about half a yard of a piece of cloth, often bent into a triangular form and tied behind the head. An African print may also be used as a *duku*, often in two yards of cloth but folded and tied on the head into the desired style.

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[119] Interview with Hajia Fati Suleimanu, 15 August 2022, a lecturer at the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana. Her areas of interest include religion, gender and politics in Ghana.
[120] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/These-are-the-meanings-of-some-duku-styles-in-Ghana-1386493 [Accessed 23 March 2023]
[121] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/These-are-the-meanings-of-some-duku-styles-in-Ghana-1386493 Accessed 23 March 2023
[122] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/These-are-the-meanings-of-some-duku-styles-in-Ghana-1386493 Accessed 23 March 2023
[123] This type of head covering appreciated in the texture of the material; it is mostly associated with the affluent, especially women who had their children in Europe.
[124] It was used by women to communicate to their lovers about where to meet.
[125] This name is given to the head tie because of its durability; it lasts for a long time. Mma Fati, interviewed at the Madina Market, 28 March 2023.

Fig. 3.3, A bride wearing *gele* headcover. Photo by author.

For example, at the Deeper Life Bible Church in Madina, the main style of the prescribed head covering among the female congregants is *duku*. Also, both unmarried and married Muslim women use *duku* to complement their African print dresses or *abaya*. Due to the multi-ethnic context of Madina, other styles of *duku*, including *areewa*[126] from northern Nigeria, turban of North Africa, and *gele*[127] from southern and eastern Nigeria are prevalent. *Gele* is the most popular *duku* style among Muslim brides in the Zongo. This head cover is associated with the Yoruba from southern-eastern Nigeria.

[126] This is the head covering style of women from northern Nigeria, mostly Hausa-speaking people.
[127] A head covering style associated with the Yoruba from Nigeria

Fig. 3.4, Another *gele* style
Photos by David Kwekutse

Fig. 3.5. A turban style

The style has been part of Zongo women's beauty practices for decades; it predates the *areewa* and turban head coverings. Muslim brides use *gele* to complement their lace dresses on their wedding day. In the recent past, women who belonged to solidarity associations[128] (popularly known as meetings) in most Zongo communities also used *gele* as a form of identity marker during weddings. In the wake of the criticisms about exorbitant Muslim weddings in the Zongo, including about the spending on *yaayi*[129] (Alhassan 2010), now *gele* is gradually replacing *yaayi,* since these women argue that unlike *yaayi, gele* is less expensive and a single *gele* can be repeatedly worn at several functions.

Mayafi

Mayafi is a Hausa word meaning 'that which covers'. It is similar to the Indian and Pakistani *dupatta*, northern Nigeria's *gyale* (Renne 2013: 65) and the *lullu'bi* in Niger (Masquelier 2009: 221). The covering is worn as a shawl or a large scarf around the head, shoulders and upper part of a woman's body and parts of her arms. *Mayafi* is worn over a *duku* and made to loosely hang on both shoulders, to make visible one's fashionable and sometimes expensive earrings and necklace, or worn with one

[128] Groups targeted at creating kin-like relationships in a migrant community (see Pellow 1987: 489)
[129] African print cloth selected to commemorate a wedding or a joyous event in Zongo communities. In most Zongos, every wedding comes with its own *yaayi* and the distribution of gifts (*rabo*) to the wedding guests. See Cassiman, Costumes and kin: The (un)making of female togetherness in Accra's Zongos, presented at MIASA-University of Ghana, Legon. 6 May 2025.

end thrown over the opposite shoulder. *Mayafi* is usually a two-yard cloth in a rectangular or square shape, often larger than *duku*. Whereas *duku* head covering practices preceded the introduction of Islam in Ghana, *mayafi* is fairly recent. Its origin is associated with contacts with Hausa traders from Nigeria who migrated to Accra in the 20th century (also see Pellow 1987: 496). While some traders came with their spouses, who already used *mayafi*, others also inter-married and introduced *mayafi* as status marker to their spouses. In the words of Pellow (1988: 219), *mayafi* indicates to men to keep their distance from a woman wearing one. For some of the wives of Hausa traders who practised *purdah* (for *purdah*, see Almila 2018: 2) or *auren kulle* (seclusion), *mayafi*, like the *hijab*, served as an extended version of seclusion in the public space, to make the women 'invisible', and functioned as a source of mobile seclusion (Masquelier 2009: 211).

As contended by Weiss (2008), the practice of Islamization in the regions around the Volta Basin, including the then Gold Coast, was mostly spearheaded by Hausa Muslim traders rather than by Muslim clerics. Their Islamic religious practices were mixed with traditional practices, and they practised divination and used amulets for protection. At the *makaranta* (traditional Qur'anic schools), young girls did not cover their heads, contrary to what we see today. My mother told me that in the 1960s and 1970s, the ASWAJ Traditional Arabic Schools did not include head covering in the uniform of their female students.[130] She and her sisters attended a popular Sunni traditional school known as Nuriyya in Nima and did so with their heads uncovered. When she showed a photograph of herself and classmates that was posted on their WhatsApp group, I observed that even though the focus of their education was purely Islamic, in addition to the uncovered hair of the female students, the style of their uniform was similar to the uniforms of female students who attended British colonial schools: a sleeveless top that extended to the knee level (see Fig. 30). Currently, there is no traditional Qur'anic school in the Zongos that does not include the veil as part of the uniform of its female students. Factors accounting for this shift in veiling practice can be attributed to the activities of Muslim revivalists in the Gold Coast, as well as to diplomatic relations with the Middle East (Dumbe 2009: 225). A detailed analysis of this will be discussed in the section on *hijab*.

[130] Interviewed on 20 June 2020.

Fig. 3.6, A photograph of the students of Nuriyya Islamic school in Nima, in the 1970s. Photograph retrieved from the Whats App group of Nuriyya Islamic school old students' association.[131]

In contemporary Zongo ethics and aesthetics, *mayafi* is the most visible beauty item for married Muslim women (Cassiman 2022: 13); this is why *mayafi* forms part of a woman's dowry (*lefe)*. The term *amaria* (Hausa: a married woman) is associated with married Muslim women, and this is often due to the fact that they are seen using a *mayafi*. Within this context, when an unmarried girl is spotted wearing a larger *mayafi* all the time, it is interpreted as *ta na sawre awure* ('she is eager to get married'). Traditionally, it is inappropriate for a young girl who has not yet been married to don a larger *mayafi*, since it is interpreted as being eager to participate in the actions that are restricted to married women only (e.g. sexual intercourse). However, during celebrations such as Eid, these boundaries are blurred, since both married and single women don a *mayafi*.

This indicates that the donning of a *mayafi* by Muslim women is context-dependent. The *mayafi* is very significant in the material culture of Muslim women to the extent that when a woman is divorced, she stops wearing one, to communicate to the members of the community that she is 'on the market' (*taabari awure*).[132] Around the 1970s and 1980s, the *mayafi* was associated by some secularly educated Muslims and non-Muslims with poverty, illiteracy and female suppression. This is because most of the immigrants who first settled in the Zongos were seen as poor people who were

[131] A permission was sought from the group.
[132] Available for marriage.

not literate in English. This meant that most educated Muslim women disassociated themselves from wearing it. Those who felt compelled to wear it (especially married women) often used a size smaller than the ordinary two yards of fabric and hung it over their shoulders instead of their heads.[133] Over the years, *mayafi* has gone through several transformations; it has evolved from a cultural beauty practice and status marker to an expression of wealth, piety and even political affiliation, and to being a fashion statement.

Mayafi has undergone several transformations in terms of its ornamentation, religious, social, political and economic significance. Presently, *mayafi* are designed with embroidery and decoration, and made of different textiles and colours; some are accorded cosmopolitan names as marketing strategies. These names include: 'I love my husband', 'internet', '3D' and 'Aisha Buhari'.[134] International trade, pilgrimage to Makkah, and technological advancement have all played an important role in the multiple manifestations of *mayafi*. The meaning of *mayafi* has broadened—for instance, a divorced woman may choose not to drop her *mayafi* if she is not interested in marrying again, or she may want to keep her *mayafi* as a symbol of modesty. As a fashion accessory, *mayafi* is an economic marker of wealth, with some currently costing as much as one hundred euros. Some married women in the Zongos currently prefer a smaller *mayafi*, called *kashkha* and often imported from Dubai, since they are able to drape it with a lot of ease. Besides, some women have stated that their husbands prefer *khashkha mayafi* since it makes them look younger. Currently, *mayafi* is mostly worn by married women at events that require a lot of merrymaking, such as naming ceremonies, weddings and Eid celebrations. There are also *mayafi* designed in political colours, often used by Muslim women during political programmes (see figs. 31 & 32).

[133] Interview with H ajia Fati Sulemanu, 15 September 2022.
[134] Representing a type of veil used by the wife of the former president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Bukhari.

Fig.3.7 ,A newly married Muslim woman, wearing *odasubo* and *mayafi.*[135] Photo by author.

Fig. 3.8, *Duku* (left) and *mayafi* (right), designed in political colours. Photo by author.

[135] This lady played the role of an MC during a graduation ceremony of apprentices at the 'High Vision Beauty Salon' in Madina Zongo. Her clothing, made up of the kaba and slit with a cover cloth, a duku and mayafi fitted her status as a newly married woman. During the ceremony, she constantly had to retie her covering cloth. She asked her audience to pardon her because she was newly married and still learning to tie the cloth properly.

Hijab

Hijab is a word in Arabic which means to prevent, to cover, to separate or conceal (Almila 2018: 2). It is used in describing a particular type of veiling practice used by Muslim women to cover the upper and lower parts of the body. Some have argued that the term cannot be traced to the Qur'an or hadith of the Prophet when used in reference to women's head cover (Almila 2018: 2), but that it was a head covering practice of Middle Eastern women which found its way into modern Islamic practices (Mahdi 2009: 2). Nonetheless, apart from a particular form of dressing, I have argued in Khamis (2024) that the term *hijab* is widely construed as a generic term to refer to the injunction of head covering for Muslim women. In Ghana, the word *hijab* refers to a specific type of veiling different from *duku* and *mayafi*; its introduction into Ghana is attributed to geopolitical influence from Saudi Arabia and Iran, and to some extent Libya, Turkey and Lebanon.

The Muslim world, comprising Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Kuwait, among other countries, has for several years provided charity to African countries in relation to food supplies and building of mosques and hospitals, as well as the provision of educational scholarships (also see Weiss 2008: 352–354; Dumbe 2009 :132, 2013:54). In addition, multi-lateral trade relations between Ghana and some Middle Eastern countries have contributed to the changing attitude of Ghanaian Muslims towards veiling. A lecturer at the Mahad Training Institute[136] (a college of Qur'anic studies) in Madina stated in an interview that he was among the first batch of thirty Ghanaian Muslim men who were granted scholarships to study in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s, which exposed them to the Saudi dress code for women in public. Upon their return to Ghana, the Muslim scholars preached about it and sought to awaken women about the need to cover their bodies and dress modestly in the public space even when they are not married. Since most of these scholars were trained in Saudi Arabia, they promoted a style of *hijab* similar to the teachings and practices of Saudi Islam (similar, therefore to ASWAJ). This idea is also corroborated by Weiss (2008: 352), as he emphasizes that the exposure of Muslim students in Ghana to Saudi Arabia contributed to the introduction of a new Islamic identity, whose focus was directed towards the internal affairs of Zongo communities and not to Ghana as a country.

Some scholars have argued that the relationship between Ghana and the Muslim World was beyond the provision of humanitarian services. For instance Weiss (p 352) adds that the training these Ghanaian scholars received was geared towards the establishment of global Muslim

[136] Interviewed 11 May 2022.

community, one that was more exclusive and largely anti-Sufi and that has led to intra-religious conflicts. Dumbe (2013:13), on the other hand suggested that this relationship was the result of Dr Kwame Nkrumah's foreign policy which was focused on alliance with the Muslim world, to champion Dr Nkrumah's vision of Pan-Africanism, and economic emancipation for Ghana and Africa at large.

Another interesting dimension of the popularization of the *hijab* in Zongo communities is the veiling practices of the wives of ASWAJ-trained scholars who joined their husbands in Saudi Arabia. During the 20th century, these women returned to Ghana and propagated the Saudi version of Muslim women's dress code in public. The attitude of the women towards the *hijab* could be seen as an attempt to join their male compatriots in purifying Islamic practices (Dumbe 2013; Kobo 2015) in Ghana. In Khamis (2024) I showed some of these women (wives of ASWAJ trained scholars) preached against the sartorial excesses of Muslim women's clothing code in most Zongo communities and encouraged them to use the *hijab*. Some of these women argued that *mayafi* is connected with certain sartorial excesses which are not in tune with Islamic law on modesty (also see Sulemanu 2006; Khamis 2009). For example, its ornamentation, transparent fabric, embroidery designs, political colours and sometimes images of political figures—such as the Lordina Mahama's *mayafi*[137]—all defeat the purpose of modesty and piety. Additionally, *duku* veiling practice was identified as inappropriate for Muslim women, since it exposed the neck and earrings, and it made the outline of the breasts and upper part of the woman's body visible. The best way to use a *duku* is to use it as a first layer under the *hijab*, to ensure that the hair is completely covered. The wives of the Saudi-trained scholars were also noted for speaking against some Zongo beauty practices such as *yaayi* and *salla* bills. They criticized Zongo women for misplacing their priorities by spending lavishly on religious and social occasions at the expense of their children's education (also see Sulemanu 2009). They preached the submission of women in marriage and emphasized the need for Zongo women to take Islamic education seriously.

These ASWAJ women were usually spotted in black *abaya*,[138] with long *hijab*s that covered them from head to toe, while some of them wore *niqabs*[139] and socks as well as hand gloves; this earned them the name 'black ninjas' in some Zongo communities.[140] In an effort to influence the religious lives of women in the Zongo, they established traditional Qur'anic schools for young

[137] A *mayafi* which had images of a former First Lady and now the First Lady of Ghana, who ironically happens to be a Christian.
[138] A full-length dress associated with Muslim women in the Arab world.
[139] A face veil used by some Muslim women.
[140] Interview with Hajia Salamatu Tahir Umar Kuta, 15 June 2022.

female Muslims. Gradually, some Muslim women began to copy the wives of the Saudi-trained scholars, and some women, especially students at the Arabic schools, did away with their *mayafi* and settled for the *hijab*. Those who maintained their *mayafi* ensured that it was tightly wrapped around their faces and pinned on the side to avoid the exposure of their necks and jewellery as well as the curves of their bodies. For these ASWAJ women, the *hijab* differed remarkably from *duku* and *mayafi*, representing the epitome of female modesty. This is because, with an opening around the face and the wrist, it conceals the shape of their bodies from head to toe. Women do not need a special skill to don the *hijab*, as compared with *duku*, thereby making the woman's body less dangerous and the clothing more easily adapted for everyday use in the public space. Unfortunately, the shift from *mayafi* to *hijab* was met with some opposition, which was inter-generational in nature. For example, young Muslim women who adopted the *hijab* of their ASWAJ female religious authorities (*malama*) were identified as religiously overzealous. Some mothers and aunties from the Zongo feared that the use of *hijab* by unmarried women could jeopardize their prospects of getting married in the future, since some men would assume that they were already married.

The *hijab,* as an emerging veiling practice was also popularized by the presence of the Lebanese in Ghana when they established the Ghana-Lebanon Islamic Senior High School in 2001, where the *hijab* formed part of the uniform of the female students (see Khamis 2024). Again, the Turkish investment in Ghana's National Mosque[141] and their involvement in providing Islamic education to young Muslim women and educational scholarships for Muslim students to study in Turkey have also contributed to promoting the *hijab* in Ghana. Moreover, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran started educational institutions and health facilities in Ghana, led by Shia Muslims (Weiss 2008; Dumbe, 2013) who also emphasized the need for Muslim women to cover their heads. At the Islamic University College (founded in 2000), where I work, and the Lady Fatima Senior High School (founded in 2015), both built by Shiites from Iran, all female students irrespective of their religious affiliations are required to wear the *hijab* in the school's premises. In these educational institutions, an annual beauty pageant called Miss Hijab is organized to encourage young females to wear the *hijab*. Ironically, this seems to defy the purpose of the *hijab* (lit. to screen or to cover), which is to avoid drawing public attention.

In Madina, a Muslim woman could be seen donning a head scarf because her workspace does not allow her to use a *hijab* or *mayafi*, even though she may be married. Meanwhile, one group that stands out in Madina and noted for a particular kind of *hijab* practice is the Firdaus Madrasa, a

[141] This is the second-largest mosque in West Africa, built in collaboration with the Muslim community and the Turkish government. https://www.arc.gov.gh/portfolios/ghana-national-mosque-complex/ [Accessed 22 May 2025]

female Qur'anic school founded by Hajia Salamatu Tuahir Umar Kuta, popularly known as Malama Sala, wife of the late Imam (Sheikh Yunus Ibrahim) of Madina Zongo (Khamis 2009, Zakariah 2023), who joined her husband on a Saudi scholarship grant in the 1970s. Even though she was not formally educated in Saudi Arabia, the socialization she had in the Saudi environment made her imbibe the lifestyle of the Saudi people, including their language and dress practices. Upon the couple's return to Ghana, Malama Sala noticed what now appeared to her as lapses in the performance of Islamic rituals and practices among Ghanaian Muslim women, especially with regard to prayer, recitation of the Qur'an and dress practices. She therefore set up a Qur'anic school in Madina to educate Muslim women on the need to understand Islamic doctrines and practise them appropriately, in line with what she had seen in Saudi Arabia[142].

Today, Hajia Sala has gained admiration from Muslims in Madina, including Muslim men, for the success she has achieved in organizing Muslim women and re-orienting them towards 'proper' Islamic beliefs and practices. Hajia Sala's initiative regarding the Qur'anic schools for Muslims and its *hijab* practices for women was not unique to women in Madina. Her counterparts, Hajia Aida Jibril and Hajia Memuna Maliki, had similar programmes for Muslim women in other Zongo communities, including Nima and Mamobi. As pointed out by Mahmood (2006), Ahmed (2011) and Janson (2013), quite a number of Muslim women's study groups have emerged across Africa over the last few decades. These schools (just like the one in Madina) laid the foundation for a specific form of the reformists' understanding of female piety, which included the wearing of *hijab*.

In Madina, *hijab* comes in different shapes, colours and sizes used by Muslim women from different backgrounds. For example, women and female children who attend traditional Arabic schools use different colours of *hijab,* sometimes with the names of the schools printed on them. This practice is not peculiar to Madina, since nowadays all Qur'anic schools across the country require all females to wear the *hijab*. One of the popular printed *hijab*s in Madina is the Firdaws@20 *hijab*.[143] These *hijab*s are more than a religious garment, as they signify a sense of belonging. Students at Anisa Senior High School located in Madina Estate also use a special type of *hijab* as part of their school uniform, while some Muslim brides also prefer to use bridal *hijab*s designed to suit their bridal gowns.

[142] Hajia also owns Firdaws International School in Madina, a secular-Islamic School from primary to the junior-high school level. She also runs a Qur'anic school for Muslim children in the same facility during weekends.
[143] A hijab inscribed to commemorate the 20th anniversary of a traditional Qur'anic school in Madina called Firdaws.

Fig. 3.9, Firdaws @20 hijab. Photo by author.

Even though the ASWAJ women encouraged Muslim women to wear the *hijab* at all public functions, I have noticed that most Muslim women respond through selective adaptation, as they choose when to and not to use the *hijab*. For instance, the *hijab* is used by most Muslim women in Madina as a religious garment for performing religious rituals such as the five daily prayers, for attending Qur'anic schools and during funerals, while *mayafi* is used during occasions that involve a lot of merrymaking, including weddings and Eid celebrations. Even though the introduction of the *hijab* in Ghana is linked to the activities of ASWAJ, currently it is very difficult to distinguish Tijaniyyah, Shia and ASWAJ women on the basis of their *hijab* practices. Muslim women in the Zongo use *hijab* when the need arises to fit different occasions. The adoption of the *hijab* by non-ASWAJ women could also be attributed to the unlimited fashion attached to it in recent times.

In recent times, global entanglements, including trading activities of Ghanaian women in the Arab World and in Nigeria, the 9/11 attack on the United States, and images of women in *hijab* on international television channels (*BBC* and *Aljazeera*), have also contributed to promoting the *hijab* and widening its market and acceptability in the public. The conspicuousness of the *hijab* in the public space continues to gain currency in global discourses—in Europe, America, Canada,

Afghanistan, Iran and also in African countries such as Nigeria, Niger and Ghana (Asad 2006; Mahdi 2009; Masquelier 2009; Moors 2009; Fadil 2011; Bolaji 2018; Burchardt 2020). The religious and political discourses around the use of *hijab* in public spaces are also embedded in social, gender and historical debates. Global debates around the *hijab* also impact what happens in Ghana and consequently disturb the relationship between Muslims and Christians in the country, which is described constitutionally as a secular state.

In the case of Ghana, I have argued in Khamis (2021,2024) that the visibility of *hijab* in most public institutions continues to create tensions between some Muslims and Christians. I (Khamis 2024) made reference to the court case between the Ghana Muslim Students Association and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in 2013, a public institution dominated by Christians, because some female Muslim students were prevented from sitting for their final exams because they chose to appear in their *hijab*s.[144] The court judged in favour of the Muslim students, with the reason that it is constitutionally unacceptable to 'prevent any candidate from writing their papers solely because of their dress code which may be attributable to their religious beliefs or otherwise'. Similar incidents of tensions were recorded in public and Christian-owned hospitals and in other public institutions where Muslim employees donned the *hijab*. For instance, Darko (2022) observes that at the Pentecost Hospital located in Madina, the use of the *hijab* flouted the dress code of the hospital.

I (Khamis 2024) explained that the basis for the court ruling was largely attributed to the Ghanaian model of secularity. This model does not imply a total restriction of religion to the private space, as is the case in some European countries; rather, it recognizes the important role religion plays in public life and emphasizes the freedom of religious association (Meyer 2012: 91–92; Quashigah 2010: 304). However, due to the hegemony of the Christian religion probably because of pre-existing colonial infrastructure and legacies, Christians in Ghana appear to be in charge of most public institutions in the country, and hence the friction between Muslims and Christians. In most of these instances, the Muslim community,[145] including the Ghana Muslim Students Association and the Office of the National Chief Imam, reacted by expressing their displeasure on the *hijab* issue via media platforms and sometimes by staging public demonstrations in various parts of the country. Often, the *hijab* issue seems to take a political twist, where politicians make public statements about the discrimination against Muslim women based on their dress practices and call on all Ghanaians to

[144] The hijab judgement, Ghana Muslim Students Association, Fatima Uthman, Adelaide Dodoo Versus the West African Examination Council, 28 June 2013.
[145] Muslim non-governmental institutions and Muslim parents

respect the 1992 Constitution, which states in article 21(1) (C) that 'every citizen of Ghana shall have the right to profess the religion of his or her choice and to manifest it'.

For instance, the then political party in government, the (NPP), appears to accord prominence to Muslims, despite being the minority religious group, by assigning the seat of the Vice President to a Muslim[146] and by creating a special Ministry in charge of Zongo Development.[147] Prior to his election to the office of the presidency, Nana Akufo Addo advised politicians not to meddle into the *hijab* debate but rather leave it to Muslims and Christians to resolve it through dialogue.[148] However, when the *hijab* issue surfaced again after some Muslim nurses were sacked from their post for wearing it, Nana Akufo Addo's Minister of Zongo and Inner Cities Development issued strong statements about the need to respect the constitutional rights of Muslim women who choose to wear the *hijab*.[149] A section of the Muslim community appeared to be dissatisfied with the comment of the minister and still look forward to the president's public statement about the discrimination against Muslim women based on their *hijab*s—as his predecessor, former President Mahama (now the current president), did when the *hijab* issue came up before.[150]

However, I argued that the posture of the former vice president and his spouse Samira Bawumia, who are both Muslims but have not made any public statements on the *hijab*, is a concern to several Muslims in Madina. Some have asked if this couple really have the Muslim community at heart or whether they consider their political ambitions as paramount, especially considering the fact that the former vice president was elected by his party to contest the presidency in the general election in 2024. Meanwhile, security analysts have cautioned against the consequences of marginalizing minority groups given that the Constitution allows freedom of expression, adding that this is likely to threaten peace in the country.

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[146] He is the first Muslim in Ghana to have been elected as the flag bearer of the New Patriotic Party to contest the seat of the presidency in the December 2024 elections.

[147] This ministry was later scrapped by the government that created it. The opposition to the New Patriotic Part (NPP), the National Democratic Congress (NDC), argued that the creation of the Zongo ministry was a calculated move by the NPP to win votes from Muslims, not to help fight for their rights.

[148] https://www.modernghana.com/sports/604315/dont-meddle-in-hijab-debate-akufo-addo-tells-politicians.html Accessed 2 January 2023

[149] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/I-ll-fight-for-hijab-nurses-with-my-last-breath-Mustapha-Hamid-719217 Accessed 20 June 2020

[150] https://citinewsroom.com/2019/06/declare-your-stance-on-hijab-wearing-in-ghana-muslim-cleric-to-govt/ Accessed 20 June 2020

Fig. 3.10, A public protest on the need to allow Muslim women to veil in public organizations. Photo retrieved from https://www.deinsider.com/2019/10/ghanaian-muslims-protest-over-hijab-discrimination/ Accessed 20 March 2023, Khamis 2024

Obviously, the *hijab* debate in Ghana is influenced by debates elsewhere, such as in Europe, Asia and some parts of Africa. The discourse on the restriction of the *hijab* challenges secularity in Ghana,[151] where the Constitution allows religious practitioners the freedom to choose and express their religion but leaves the application of the constitutional right in the hands of the people (Sarbah 2023:397). Although some continue to argue that the government is making an effort to curb the hegemony of Christianity by sponsoring Muslim pilgrimages to Makkah and facilitating the building of mosques, Christians, with their numerical strength of 70% of Ghana's total population, appear to dominate most public institutions and, as a result, ensure that their religious practices dominate in these public spaces (Sarbah 2018: 216). This may also be due partly to what Jeffery Haynes (2023: 1–2) called Christian Nationalism, an ideology that gives Christians the right to dominate and have control over political and economic sectors in Ghana. Haynes (p. 14) points to the growing concern among Christians in Ghana about political Islam, an ideology characteristic of Muslims across the globe. Some Christians fear that diplomatic relations between Ghanaian Muslims and the Muslim world could lead to religious extremism and terrorism in Ghana (also see Meinema 2021, in the case of Kenya).

[151] Here, I use the term secularity as a legal position, which emphasizes the neutrality of the state in religious matters while it ensures freedom of religion for all citizens.

Unlike the *duku* and *mayafi* which are local veiling practices, the *hijab* introduced as a result of transnational relations with the Muslim world contributes to the persistent occurrence of tensions between Muslims and Christians in Ghana's public space. For example, most public infrastructure such as public schools and hospitals in Ghana built by the British colonial masters, were operated along the lines of the Christian faith, making Christian practices an integral part of the cultures of these institutions. In Khamis (2024), I showed how Madina had its fair share of tensions around the *hijab*; in 2020, thirty-five female Muslim candidates of Anisa Senior High School in Madina and Mercy Islamic Senior High School (in a neighbouring community), where the *hijab* forms part of the schools' uniform, were prevented from sitting their West African Senior Secondary Certificate Exams (WASSCE) in their *hijab*s at the examination centre in Madina.[152] The reason was that in the previous year, a Muslim student was caught with a piece of paper in the examination hall, containing answers to the examination questions, which was hidden in her *hijab*. The supervisor in charge of the examination at the centre insisted that all students who had arrived at the centre for the WASSCE were required to remove their *hijab*s to prevent the re-occurrence of such an event.

It took the intervention of the management of the Anisa School and some executives of the Ghana Muslim Students Association (GMSA) to convince the said supervisor. They backed their claims for wearing the *hijab* on a previous court injunction involving a case between GMSA and WAEC, where a Muslim student was denied permission to sit her exams because of her *hijab*. The injunction stated that no female Muslim should be denied her right on the basis of religious affiliation. It may be argued that the prohibition of the *hijab* in an examination hall is not necessarily based on religious grounds but possible examination malpractices. Here, the teachers at Anisa School contested that if the supervisor from WAEC claims the *hijab* as a garment has the potential to allow students to engage in examination malpractice, then all candidates should go into the examination hall naked. They suggested that all candidates must be subjected to body search before they are allowed into the examination hall, adding that whoever flouts examination regulations should be made to face the appropriate sanctions.

The *hijab* continues to be a matter of contestation in the public space, including in Islamic schools located in Madina as well as in the Pentecost Hospital in Madina (Darko 2022). I have observed that aside the *hijab*, *duku* and *mayafi* do not generate tensions in the public space; this may be due to the fact that such practices are common to both Muslims and Christians in Ghana. Again, *duku* and *mayafi* are mostly used in informal spaces and sometimes in various work places to

[152] Interview with Muhsin Suleyman, A patron of GMSA at the An-Nisa Senior High school. 21 February 2021.

promote Ghanaian culture. The tension behind the use of *hijab* in Ghana is certainly influenced by both local and external factors and is thus connected with efforts to maintain the hegemony of a group who feel they are the majority.

Niqab

As I have stated in Khamis (2021), *Niqab* is not a common veiling practice among Muslim women in Ghana, as it is the case for Muslim women in some parts of the Asian and Northern African countries. In Ghana, Muslim women who don the *niqab* in the Zongo are very few. The discourse on the use of *niqab* by Muslim women is contested among Muslim scholars. The contestation concerns issues around the *awra*[153] of female Muslims and interrogates whether the face is an integral part of it . Al Qaradawi (2006)[154] and Khan (2016) have claimed that the Qur'an commends women to dress modestly and veil their heads but not their faces. Their position is based on Qur'an, Chapter 24: Verse 31:

> *And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity and not to reveal their adornment except what normally appears. Let them draw their veils over their chest, and not reveal their adornment except what normally appears…*

Additionally, these authors refer to a hadith of Prophet Muhammed that instructs that when a woman gets to the age of puberty, she should cover her body except for her hands and face. This is why Al Qaradawi and Khan maintain that the *niqab* is not mandatory for female Muslims (Khamis 2021). I stated that interviews with some religious leaders in Madina,[155] underscored that the *niqab* is not an obligation for Muslim women's dress as is the case with the *hijab.*[156] Since some female religious leaders equate the use of *niqab* with a non-obligatory prayer, one interlocutor explained that using it attracts a reward from God but if a woman does not practice it, she would not be punished. In Madina Zongo, Muslim women who wear the *niqab* cite social and religious reasons. Another interlocutor recalled her pilgrimage to Mecca:

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[153] Private part of a woman's body, expected to be concealed from unrelated men .
[154] http://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/Qatar/al-qaradawi-says-wearing-niqab-not-mandatory-1.264527 Accessed 31 May 2021
[155] A female Muslim teacher of Islam in Hausa. Unlike their male counterpart the Malam, who may offer spiritual healing, the Malama focuses solely on religious education.
[156] They explained that the Qur'an and hadith are explicit about the importance of the hijab for Muslim women.

> When I went to the bathroom to perform ablution, I saw an Arab woman in Baby Phat[157] jeans and top, which she wore under her *abaya.* Her gold bangles were a beautiful sight, including her gold earrings and necklace, but all these were covered with *abaya* and a *niqab*. I said to myself: 'If an Arab woman who lives close to the *ka'ba*[158] is this modest, why shouldn't I emulate her?' (Khamis (2021).

Also, another interlocutor who belongs to a *tabligh jamaat* [159], explains that Qur'an 24:31 is the inspiration behind her adoption of the *niqab.* According to her, the verse means covering not only the head and the body, but also the face. Most of the interviewees who wore *niqab* before the pandemic also refer to this garment as a devotional material, which ensures a closer relationship with God. They explain that they feel rewarded by God for using face veils. At the same time, a *niqab* screens them from the gazes of unrelated men. One typical characteristic of the Zongo community is the phenomenon of 'bases' (Muhammed 2015), where Muslim men gather to socialize after work. Usually, a woman can expect unnecessary gazes and calls from these young men any time she walks by, but *niqab* wearers reported that they can pass without any form of harassment. According to them, the *niqab* offers them *daraja*—respect from the opposite sex. The *niqab* wearers have also attributed their lighter faces, a beauty ideal in the Zongo, to the face veil, mentioning that it screens them from the scorching sun (Khamis 2021: 24)

Fig. 3.11, A Muslim woman in a *niqab*. Photo by author.

[157] A fashion label for women developed in America around 1999.
[158] The main Muslim shrine, located in Mecca, regarded as the most sacred place on earth.
[159] A multi-national Islamic missionary group that originated in India and Pakistan.

I have argued that notwithstanding the social, sartorial and religious significance of donning the face veil in the Zongo, some interlocutors pointed to the challenges they face in shared spaces such as markets, hospitals and public transportation. They explained that their family members, who are also Muslims, have attempted to discourage them from wearing the *niqab,* because the social setting in Madina Zongo does not support it. This is attributed to the fact that women from Saudi Arabia, whom the Zongo Muslim women claim to emulate, are not actively engaged in public life. By contrast, a majority of women in the Zongo are involved in various types of economic, social, political and religious activities in the public space. Another interlocutor stated that she had to put a stop to her use of the *niqab* due to her profession as a fashion designer, which requires a constant face-to-face interaction with clients. Realizing that the *niqab* would deter clients from choosing her services in a competitive fashion industry in the Zongo, she decided to uncover her face.

Beauty, Piety and Cross-Religious Borrowing of Veiling Practices

The terms 'beauty' and 'piety' may seem incompatible, since beauty is often linked to aesthetics and things that are pleasing to the eyes. On the other hand, piety is used in reference to a state of devotion or intense reverence to the Creator. Therefore, using these terms in describing the everyday beauty practices of women living in a religiously plural and ethnically diverse setting like Madina Zongo may be problematic. On the contrary, recent scholarly works on the beauty practices of Muslim women have revealed that some scholars have used similar terms, including Islamic fashion (Moors 2009), modest fashion (Shiraz 2016), pious fashion (Bucar 2017), as well as fashion and faith (Sheva Hass & Lutek 2019), in describing the day to day beauty practices of Muslim women in religiously diverse communities across the world.

This chapter states that in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious context where women are exposed to other forms of veiling through global and local contacts, they copy and borrow different head covering styles from other cultures and religious groups. In Khamis (2021) reference was made to Janson's (2021) idea of "religious shoppers" to explain how in religiously pluralistic settings, religious people borrow and copy each others practices for pragmatic reasons, implying that Islam and Christianity are not mutually exclusive religions (see also Soares 2010; Larkin 2014; Janson and Meyer 2016). Again, this chapter in a way responds to Janson's call to the dynamics of copying and mixing. Here, the chapter pays particular attention to the dynamics involved in mixing beauty and piety and its impact on religious co-existence from the gendered perspective. As I have already

argued, in the Zongo, religious boundaries are fluid and not fixed, since practitioners from different religious groups borrow and copy from each other.

In Madina, the everyday life of Muslims and Christians is replete with actions and words which convey their religious beliefs and sentiments. As far as these religious practitioners are concerned, religion is not solely about interiority but also its outward expression. Elsewhere, Masquelier (2009: 213) explains that some Muslim women may refer to veiling as covering their bodies; apart from this, it also separates and isolates them from the outside world and creates what she calls 'pious interiority'. Also, Almila (2018:233) pointed out that a discussion on veiling, requires a critical analysis of the cultural perception about the public and private spaces. In some societies, veiling serves as a method of gender segregation, where the public and the private are not strictly constructed for men and women, but rather very fluid and allows for boundary crossing, especially for women. Quoting Kotnik (2005:480), Almila (2018: 236) stated that 'the veil functions as a movable interior space that allows women to penetrate exterior space'. In Madina, most Muslim and some Christian women subscribe to various forms of veiling as an expression of their inner religious convictions. Therefore, the question of whether one's religiousness can be determined by a piece of cloth (Mahdi 2009) strongly applies to Muslim and some Christian women in Madina. For these women in the Zongo, the materiality of the veil plays an important role in the expression of religion. In short, the veil is a symbolic representation of piety. However, being pious does not mean that women cannot be fashionable or look beautiful.

For instance in Khamis (2024), it was shown how some Christian women also revealed that even though their churches do not enjoin women to cover their heads at church and during private prayer sessions, they refer to veiling as a lost tradition for Christians, since pictures of the Virgin Mary always show her in a veil. The habits of Catholic nuns were also used as a reference point for the adoption of veiling by some Christian women in Madina. At the Our Lady of Apostles Catholic Church in Madina Libya Quarters, the leader of the Women's Fellowship explained that modernity has contributed to abandoning the tradition of veiling among its female congregants.[160] She explained that it is now the preserve of Catholic nuns and members of the Women's Fellowship. However, she added, 'any time a woman is expected to perform an activity in the church which requires that she mounts the podium, she does so with her head covered'.

[160] Interview with Mama, 11 June 2021.

An interlocutor,[161] who worships at the True Faith Ministry at Agbogba but operates a shop in Madina, explained that all the female congregants in her church use head covering. She also cited the example of the Church of Pentecost (COP), where the head covering used to be the trademark of the church until a communique was later issued to abolish the prescription. She called the actions of the Church of Pentecost unfortunate since for her, head covering should play an important role in the religious life of every Christian woman, even though others think otherwise. These respondents further explained that women in the Deeper Life Church are not allowed to wear trousers and jewellery; they are not allowed to use hair extensions, and they neither wear make-up even on their wedding days nor perm their hair. When in church, they are also expected to cover their heads.[162] Using the religious argument as the basis for the church's enforcement of head covering, Deeper Life Church members refer to the book of 1 Corinthians: 11-12,[163] which states:

> *Every man who prays or prophesizes with his head covered dishonours his head. But every woman who prays or prophesizes with her head uncovered dishonours her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.*

Here, I suggest that some Muslim and Christian women in Madina sincerely participate in religious and cultural prescriptions of veiling, but at the same time they find space to negotiate within these religious prescriptions a margin to express themselves in terms of style, colour and mode of tying veils . This means that, despite the description of women's veiling practices as a religious and spiritual practice that emphasizes modesty, purity and chastity, Muslim and Christian women in Madina have imbued veiling with their own meanings and style.

It was observed that, while the mainline Christian and some Pentecostal churches do not prescribe head covering for women, a section of their female congregants, especially the Women's Fellowship, use an official attire with head covers (specifically *duku* or turbans) for specific occasions, such as when going for Holy Communion. These attires are sold through a centralized system in the church. Also, during my encounter with most women pastors in the mainline churches,

[161] Interviewed, 11 June 2021.
[162] Interview with Deborah, a member of the Deeper Life Church in Madina.
[163] I am aware that most Christians do not follow the Bible in its literal sense, especially on the issue of women's head covering. They argue that the verse in Corinthians that speaks about head covering was referring to women in a specific context and not in a general context.

it was realized that they use hats as head covers when performing church services. Here, the hats signify leadership and authority over a congregation, but also modesty. It was also observed that even though the hats used by the women ministers are supposed to be a form of veiling, the designs of these scarves/hats also add a touch of beauty to the religious practices of covering the hair. To Deeper Life Christians, the issue of veiling as a religious propriety is restricted to a religious activity of prayer or attending programmes at church. But during programmes outside the church, these women keep their head coverings in their bags and rather use them when it is time for prayer. This is why some young women who worship with the Deeper Life Church will use the veil only when they are approaching the premises of the church but not from home. Among the Deeper Lifers, the veiling practice of *duku* is more common among the older generation than among young women. This is mostly due to the fact that *duku* is a traditional beauty practice and also associated with old age and respectability.

Fig. 3.12, Members of the Women's Fellowship at the Victory Society Church in Madina in turbans. Photo from an interlocutor.

In spite of mixing of beauty with the religious practice of veiling, some Christians have argued that head covering is not an important aspect of Christian women's piety. In the Charismatic-Pentecostal churches, for instance, women are allowed to attend church and engage in religious activities without covering their heads. In addition, among the young women of the Church of Pentecost, the practice of head covering was seen as archaic and an infringement on their rights. Charles Prempeh (2020) noted that head covering was rather dominant among members of the local

assemblies and not the English ones, adding that even deaconesses did not cover their heads at the English-Speaking Assemblies. For the older generation of the Church of Pentecost, the attempt by the youth to abandon veiling is a deviation from the concept of holiness among the Pentecostals. To date, some female members of the church still practise head covering when they go to church. But the fact that the Church of Pentecost and the Catholic Church have relaxed their rules regarding women's dress styles, including allowing them to wear trousers (in the case of the Church of Pentecost) and uncover their heads in church, for the fear of losing the youth membership, indicates how Pentecostal and Catholic women have effectively negotiated their wish to be fashionable and be Christian at the same time. Meanwhile, the Deeper Life Bible Church continues to apply strict rules regarding women's dress styles as an important part of expressing female piety.

The streets of Madina are flooded with shops where dresses and veils of different styles, imported from various countries, are sold. Those who cannot afford to pay for running a store are using various online platforms to market these veils and modest clothes. This has also led to the growth of the local Islamic fashion industry in Ghana, including Nafeesah Hijab and Libaas Hilaan Modest Clothing Brand.[164] The modelling agency Shamfiz J is also a typical example of a young Muslim lady who is into the production of modest clothing for Ghanaian consumers.[165] She brings together Muslim and Christian designers of modest clothing and once a year organizes a fashion show to exhibit these products to the general public.

Based on this new initiative, Muslim women are now partaking in national beauty pageants and visibly showcasing their Islamic identity, a practice that hitherto was not common. This is true of Habeeba bint Abdallah, the second runner-up of Miss Malaika 2019, the immediate past beauty queen of Ghana's Most Beautiful 2024 beauty contest, Nihad Titiaka Oases Ibrahim.[166] Also, following the disqualification of a number of Muslim women from the mainstream beauty pageants in Ghana, as well as the challenges some Muslim women who use the *hijab* face in their various workplaces, the National Miss Muslima Beauty Pageant—initiated by Hajia Hawa Alidu, a female Muslim entrepreneur in Ghana,[167] and targeted at Muslim women—was launched in 2020 as an attempt to encourage young Muslim women to be confident in their Muslim identity.[168] The

[164] https://www.pulse.com.gh/lifestyle/fashion/fashion-ghana-sisters-blending-style-tradition-for-muslim-women/9krk3x0 Accessed 3 October 2022
[165] https://fashionpivot.com/ghana-modest-fashion-week-to-explore-the-diversity-of-modest-style-on-the-30th-july/ Accessed 3 October 2022
[166] https://www.thepublisheronline.com/nihad-titiaka-crowned-ghanas-first-hijab-wearing-gmb-queen/ Accessed 20 November 2024
[167] https://kuulpeeps.com/2021/09/10/hawa-alidu-the-uew-student-whos-the-brain-behind-the-first-ever-muslim-pageant-in-ghana/campus/uew Accessed 7 March 2023
[168] https://gh.opera.news/gh/en/entertainment/a1a754fd7aeb672ddbbeef3ace6710aa Accessed 3 October 2020

aesthetics accompanied by veiling play an important role in branding Muslim women as creative, independent and tolerant, contrary to the stereotypical labels attributed to Islam as oppressive, militant and backward. Additionally, these negotiations have contributed to making the *hijab* more acceptable in most public institutions. In the past few decades, veiling was not permitted in most public formal institutions; however, due to a change in the societal discourse and creative solutions in veiling, most Muslim women now find it very attractive and convenient to wear them. The inclusion of fashion accessories such as sunglasses, sneakers and designer bags to the wearing of veils has increased their acceptability. Muslim women are using creative techniques within the Islamic prescription to express themselves through veiling practices. In as much as women internalize religious prescriptions to wear veils, they also personalize them by incorporating their own meanings.

While such innovations are applauded by several Muslim women, there is also a section of the Muslim community—mostly ASWAJ—who are opposed to modest fashion shows as well as other expressions of Islamic fashion.[169] Their reasoning is that, veiling should include affordance that facilitate women's connection with God in relation to purity, chastity, and modesty. It must be a simple act of devotion devoid of any form of fashion. For them, the practice of Muslim women displaying their beauty on the runway in the name of modest fashion defeats the purpose of Islamic teaching on *hijab*—originally meant to make women invisible in public and also hide their beauty so that they do not seduce men. They argue that the audiences invited to such programmes are mostly made up of both sexes; this, they believe, goes contrary to the teachings of Islam. Furthermore, in their view, the publication of the modest fashion show, where pictures of such events are broadcast on various social media platforms, also adds to making women's bodies 'public commodities' and sexualized bodies.

Meanwhile, I have also demonstrated in Khamis (2021) that the visibility of various head covering styles by Muslim women in Madina has led to its adoption by a number of Christians. Some Christian women use the large *hijab*, which covers their bodies from head to toe, because it comes in handy when they want to step out of their rooms to shop nearby for their basic necessities. Moreover, some Christian respondents who have lived in the Zongo for decades mentioned that the *hijab* has become an integral part of their religious and spiritual lives, even though they continue to practise Christianity. These women believe that it offers spiritual protection to pregnant women. Among some groups in Ghana such as the Ewe-Dome, pregnant women are held to be vulnerable and to

[169] Interviewed in Madina Washington, 15 March 2023.

attract evil spirits, especially at night (see also Ganusah 2008), that are likely to harm them and their unborn babies. In addition, while the government has introduced interventions to prevent maternal and infant mortality through education and the provision of affordable health care, these women take personal initiatives by using the *hijab* to ensure their safety and that of their unborn babies. They explained that the large *hijab* blinds the eyes of evil people from seeing pregnant women, especially during the night. Also, because of the belief in the vulnerability of newborn babies, some Christian women use the *hijab* to cover their babies from the public eye whenever they are in the public space. Thus, in Madina, cross-religious borrowing in relation to women's everyday beauty practices is common among Muslim and Christian women; however, when such borrowing occurs, the practice assumes a new meaning.

Again, it has been indicated that, apart from using veiling for spiritual protection, COVID-19 brought about the use of the *hijab* and *niqab* and African print face marks with their matching *duku* as protective cloth. This new method became a strategic approach that highlighted the modes of religious co-existence among Muslims and between Muslims and Christians in Madina . The outbreak of COVID-19 led to a sort of 'religious shopping' for protection against the disease. For example, some Muslim women folded their *hijab* such that it covered their heads, necks and faces . As I also indicated, , 'some tailors in the Zongo designed what they called the corona *hijab,* which covered not only the head and parts of the body, but also the mouth and the nose' (Khamis 2021:29). In addition, some private individuals were cashing in on the government's call to the general public to produce African print face masks[170].

[170] https://religiousmatters.nl/waiting-for-god-in-times-of-covid-19-the-case-for-quarantined-beauty-parlours-in-madina-zongo/ accessed 23 October 2022.

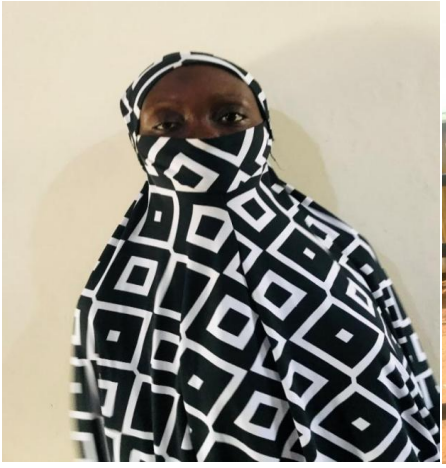

Fig. 3.13. Corona *hijab*
Photo by Eliasu Abdulai Adam.

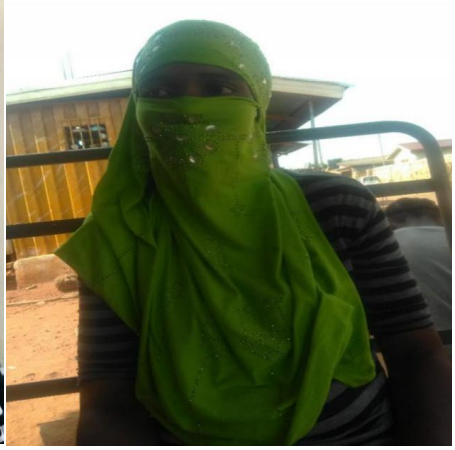

Fig. 3.14. A *hijab*-like face mask.
Photo by author.

Fig. 3.15. Head covers and their matching face masks made with African print.[171]

I also argued in Khamis (2021) that beside these inventions, perception about *niqab* in the Zongo also changed. Some women adopted it instead of a face mask, and others supported its usage even though they did not have any personal experience with it. I maintained that the *niqab* had thus been transformed from a devotional material used by a specific group of Muslim women to a

[171] Photos retrieved from https://businessday.ng/life-arts/article/garden-city-big-ladies-discover-face-mask-fashion-for-covid-19/

protective material used by women of different religious orientations(p. 29) making it impossible to identify women who used the *niqab* as conservative or radical Muslims. In other words, the *niqab* had become part of the culture, regardless of religious or political affiliation. With the outbreak of the pandemic, dealers in secondhand Muslim dresses imported from Dubai, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt (locally called *gumama*) cashed in on selling *niqab*s. The price of *niqab*s skyrocketed in Madina Zongo. An interlocutor stated that more women than before had been coming to her shop to buy *niqab*s while others started making *niqab*s from *gumama (imported second-hand clothing from the Arab world) a*nd brand new materials for sale due to increased demand.

In Khamis (2021) it has been mentioned that since a large percentage of women in the Zongo are employed in the informal sector with low income, *niqab* turned out to be more affordable to them than disposable face masks. Some interlocutors who were formerly not niqab users, began using the *niqab* and explained that due to the outbreak of COVID-19, they now owned more than one *niqab* which they are able to wash after use. Similarly, during a focus group discussion in a mosque, one woman remarked that her Christian neighbours commended Muslims for using the *niqab*: According to her, they said our dressing would prevent us from being infected with the disease, since it looked just like face masks.

Fig. 3,16. A focus group discussion with Muslim women at the Malam Yunus Mosque in Madina Zongo. Photo by author.

As it was stated in Khamis (2021:33), in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic community such as Madina Zongo, where Muslims and Christians live together and often share the same compounds, markets and houses, cross-religious borrowing and appropriation among Christian and Muslim

women is inevitable. This is why it is not unusual to see some Christian women donning the *hijab* and wearing dresses perceived as Muslim attires. According to these Christian women, being identified as Muslims gives them a sense of belonging to the Zongo community. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, some Christian women chose to wear the *niqab* even though they had never used it before. Sister Doreen, a member of the Charismatic Evangelical Ministry in North Legon (a neighbourhood in Madina), who operates a mobile money shop and shares a house with Muslims in the Zongo, explained that she was attracted to the *niqab* as a result of COVID-19. According to her, she had difficulty breathing every time she wore a face mask, and therefore found the *niqab* more convenient. She added: 'I sometimes dress my three-year-old girl in the *hijab*. My Christian friends have asked if I wanted to be a Muslim, but I told them I just admire their dressing.' Sister Doreen also mentioned that when she decided to wear the *niqab*, her Christian friends asked her if she had married a Muslim man. Other people asked her whether she had *tuba* (i.e. converted to the Islamic faith). In contrast, Muslims often expressed their approval when she used the *niqab* by saying that she looked more beautiful in it.

Daavi,[172] a member of the Global Evangelical Church in North Legon,[173] who has been living in the Zongo for twenty-seven years, never attempted to use the *hijab*, even though her daughters (6 and 14 years old) occasionally wear it in solidarity with their Muslim friends. She explained that, even though they look beautiful in it, their father disapproves of the *hijab*. She added that the children still need a more profound understanding of the Christian faith; otherwise, they could abandon their faith and accept Islam if allowed to continue with their *hijab* practice. Daavi admitted that even though she does not use the *hijab*, her dress styles have also been influenced by Muslim women's fashion in the Zongo; usually, she would prefer ankle-length dresses over the knee-length dresses that most Christians in the Zongo wear. In her words, 'Anytime I travel to my hometown in the Volta Region, my sisters say that because I live in the Zongo, I dress like a Zongo woman.' This implies that there is a kind of mixing of dress styles among Muslim and Christian women in Madina who encounter one another at various levels. Even though Daavi had never used the *niqab* before the pandemic, she thought of it as the best alternative to a face mask. According to her:

> In a tropical climate of Ghana, wearing face masks is very uncomfortable. As a market woman who does not have the luxury of working in an air-conditioned

[172] The name of this research participant has been altered.
[173] A suburb of Accra neighbouring Madina.

> office, I am exposed to the heat of the sun daily. Keeping the face mask on for a long time attracts a lot of heat around my mouth and nose area and prevents me from breathing in and out properly. This is why my face mask has most often been on my chin.

For Daavi, the *niqab* is the best substitute for the face mask because it has an opening at the base which allows the circulation of air around the mouth and nose area. However, Daavi also emphasizes the limits of borrowing and appropriating the *niqab*. She argued that the practice of some Christian women adopting the *niqab* should be borrowed with caution since it might lead to tensions between Muslims and Christians in the community. She explained that since the *niqab* is often used with a *hijab*, some Christians who wished to use the *niqab* for protection against COVID-19 needed to don it without a *hijab*. Daavi states, 'I am afraid that if this practice becomes widespread, this may generate tensions between Muslims and Christians in the Zongo, since some Muslims may describe this appropriation as a misrepresentation of their religion.'

Another interlocutor who worships with the Methodist Church in Madina stated that she sometimes uses *hijab* but never had personal experience with *niqab*. However, she sees the use of both religious apparels as orthodox Islamic practices, and as a Methodist she admires and approves religious orthodox practices. For her, the presence of *hijab*- and *niqab*-wearing women in the Zongo evokes ideas about religious piety similar to the habits of Catholic nuns. After seeing pictures of fashionable *niqab*-like face masks on social media, she was of the view that if the *niqab* was designed with colourful African fabrics, most non-Muslim women would be glad to wear it. As I have maintained in Khamis (2021) the traditional black *niqab* has become attractiveto some Christian women. As one fashion designer in Madina Zongo told me, two of her Christian customers requested a *niqab* when she sewed funeral clothes for them. She explained that the black colour of the *niqab* fits the Ghanaian traditional mourning dress and that the *niqab* offers 'convenience' when compared with the face mask. These women ordered their *niqab*s specifically for the funeral, as they thought that it was important to take extra safety measures, even though the government had restricted the number of attendants at funeral grounds. As the above examples show, veiling is a practice that reflects and responds to changing religious and social circumstances. Formally a symbol of Islamic conservatism and radicalism, during the COVID-19 pandemic these veils assumed new meanings in Madina Zongo. Such clothing practices are no longer restricted to conservative Muslim women or to Muslim women alone, but are also found among Christian women.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the negotiations between beauty and piety through the use of the veil at the informal and everyday level. The chapter argued that though the terms beauty and piety may seem antagonistic, in analysing the veiling practices of religious women in the Zongo, beauty and piety are compatible words—since women not only adhere to veiling as a religious practice, but also make room for certain negotiations in order to look beautiful and fashionable.

The chapter also argued that the binary framing of the veiling practices of Muslim and Christian women in the Zongo as beautiful and pious means that the meaning of veiling is not static but fluid; it continues to transform in accordance with the time and context. Therefore, it is problematic to attribute the veiling practices of women to simple religious practices, because some veiling practices can be motivated by one's husband, while others may be used for a sense of belonging. Again, a veiling style may be adopted for physical and spiritual protective purposes. Here, I state that the meaning of a veil can change from being a religious practice and a simple act of devotion to being used for more mundane purposes.

Additionally, the chapter suggested that the changing meaning of veiling in the Zongo allows for cross-religious borrowing. This makes evident the modality of religious co-existence from the gendered perspective. The chapter notes that even though borrowing beauty practices from the religious 'other' may be seen as an act that enhances peaceful religious co-existence among women, such acts must be undertaken with a lot of caution, since that may also strain relationships should there be a case of inappropriate borrowing.

The next chapter concentrates on another dimension of beauty: erotic beauty practices.