

THE SPATIALITY OF VEILING – MUSLIM WOMEN LIVING PRACTICES IN MINNESOTA HOMES

Samaneh Vahaji and Tasoulla Hadjiyanni

Abstract

Although much controversy surrounds the Muslim veiling tradition, little has been studied about how immigrant Muslim veiled women navigate the practice of veiling while living in western-type houses. Through interviews with ten Muslim veiled women in Minnesota, this study explores the relationship between veiling and domestic environments. The findings point to both dress and interior spaces as being forms of enclosure, one being mobile (dress), that help women construct their cultural and religious identity while providing them with privacy, protection, and a sense of control. Residing in typical, suburban American homes however, the women we interviewed experienced difficulties being unveiled in one of the few places where the veil can come off. Designers who are cognizant of cultural differences in housing needs can create homes that support various ways of living, that is, culturally sensitive housing.

Keywords

Housing; women; Muslim; culture; identity.

Introduction

Both dress and space have been positioned as markers of cultural identity, ones endowed with social meaning (Eicher, 1995; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). Limited research however, has focused on exploring the relationship between these two cultural expressions. Questions such as: “How does space relate to dress?”, “What are the implications of this relationship for spaces, like domestic environments?”, and “Which other cultural traditions and practices are impacted in the process?” warrant further exploration. Answers to these questions attain special significance under conditions of displacement when a group’s cultural practices are altered or implicated into the web of social changes that accommodates migration (Bammer, 1994). Asking these questions from within the domestic domain, the site of many cultural practices and traditions, is even more adamant as research shows that not being able to practice one’s traditions negatively impacts displaced peoples’ mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Adler, 1995; Papadopoulos, Lees, Lay and Gebrehiwot, 2004). Designers who are sensitive to the intertwining of cultural identity

definitions can better respond to the diverse needs of users by creating culturally sensitive housing, housing that supports various ways of living (Hadjiyanni, 2005, 2007).

Migrants of Middle Eastern origin, many of whom are Muslims, are among the millions of people who move in search of a better life. With Middle East studies being a relatively under-developed area (by comparison with other area studies disciplines) (Waines, 1982), expanding our understanding of the issues faced by displaced Middle Easterners can contribute to the knowledge of disciplines from anthropology to architecture. Complicating the picture further are studies of Middle Eastern women, which have been biased due to western perceptions of their status and role (McDougall, 1983). Attributed by many to Islam and Islamic Law, Muslim women's lives are examined narrowly, by foregoing for example the investigation of how factors other than religion might impact their practices and viewpoints (Keddie, 2002).

Although multiple 'voices in architectural education' have called for more research and education around cultural differences from an architectural perspective (Dutton, 1991), according to Tom Fisher "architects talk a lot about the benefits of good design for people's lives, but we do very little to quantify those benefits or to document their effects" (1996, p.42). Exploring how the built environment relates to cultural identity and the practice of traditions is especially important at a time when diversity is inherently embedded in the American cultural landscape. Such an exploration though attains further dimensions when entrenched into the study of traditions surrounded by controversy. It is probably safe to say that, particularly since

9/11, no other form of dress is as controversial as the veiling of Muslim women.

Through interviews then, with ten Middle Eastern Muslim veiled women (mohajabe) in their Minnesota homes, this study is a systematic inquiry into their beliefs and accompanying housing needs, aiming to start a dialogue around ways to apply this knowledge to architectural practice. The paper begins with a discussion of the veiling tradition and the controversy that surrounds it; continues with the study's methodology and sample description, and then delves into the analysis of the findings, highlighting why these ten women are veiled and how they navigate the practice of veiling in their homes' spatial reality. The paper concludes with culturally sensitive design solutions and directions for future research. Undertaking a study of the veil's spatiality can be construed as arguing 'for' the veil and as advocating for an architecture that is supportive of a tradition that many consider a means of keeping women subservient to men. Therefore, prior to proceeding any further, it is imperative to state that taking a stand is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, veiling is used as an example of the issues designers must be cognizant of if they are to respond to the similarities and differences that constitute cultural identity definitions (Hall, 2000).

Background: The Veiling Tradition

Although it is one of Islam's oldest traditions, veiling, or the hijab, is engulfed in controversy. The paradox behind the hijab is that on the one hand it is perhaps the most recognizable and identifiable outward sign of being a Muslim, while on the other hand, it is seen by many as a

form of social oppression. What is difficult about the hijab is the intertwining of the grounds on which either camp stands—the reasons behind those who are ‘for’ it and those ‘against’ it are tied into a web that is hard to untangle. Caught in the debate are everyone, from scholars, policy makers, educators, and designers to common people from all over the world . Therefore, before delving deeper into exploring the spatial implications of veiling, we must have an understanding of the deep roots behind this debate.

Queen Rania of Jordan, one of the Middle East’s most well-known ambassadors and an advocate for women’s rights, summarizes the debate and points to the veil’s religious associations: “For many, the hijab represents modesty, piety and devotion to God, and I truly respect that. But the hijab should not be used as means of applying social pressure on people” (TIME, 2007). Veiling’s ties to Islam are partly behind its negative perceptions by westerners, which go back to colonial attitudes that launched discourses around the veil as oppressive and backward versus as an affirmation of cultural identity and a form of resistance to colonization/ westernization forces (El Guindi, 1999; Bullock, 2002; Thangarajah, 2003; Scott, 2007).

Accentuating the controversy is the question of how much one should be covered to be a good Muslim. The different and diverse interpretations of the Quranic verse shown below are often the cause of trouble as ‘covering’ translations range from a woman’s hair (through a scarf like the hijab, prevalent in countries like Iran) to a woman’s whole body (like the Afghan burka) .

And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, and reveal

not their adornment save such as is outward; and let them cast down their veils over their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment save to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands’ fathers, or their sons, or their husbands’ sons, or their brothers, or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or what their right hands own, or such men as attend them, not having sexual desires, or children who have not yet attained knowledge of women’s private parts; nor let them stamp their feet, so that their hidden ornament may be known. And turn altogether to Allah, O you believers, happily so you will prosper (Quran, 24:31).

As dictated above, devoted Muslim women can be unveiled in the presence of only a few men—in all other cases where men are present, they must be veiled . With homes being among the few places where the veil can come off, domestic environments that account for the spatial implications of veiling can support veiled women’s well-being.

The Veil, Privacy, and Muslim Architecture

Questions around veiling are inherently framed within the context of privacy and Muslim architecture. Defined by Altman as “selective control of access to the self or to one’s group” (1975, p.18), understandings of privacy become more ambiguous when applied to groups like Arabs. Here, privacy is relational and public and it concerns primarily women and the family. According to El Guindi: “For women it is both a right and an exclusive privilege, and is reflected in dress, space, architecture and proxemic behavior” (1999, p.82).

In spite of its wide regional diversity, the residential architecture of the Middle East supports the privacy needs of the veiling tradition, or rather, women’s ability to be unveiled when at home, through physical manifestations like plans and

spatial arrangements that nurture gender separation. In order for men and women to socialize separately, Arab-Islamic settlements, both traditional and modern, are most often divided into two segments: the male quarter (*majlis*) and the family living area, the domain of women, which includes the living room, bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen, storage areas, etc. Further ensuring privacy are characteristics like each space boosting its own separate entrance and washroom. Outdoor spaces are also enmeshed in this dialogue of public and private by taking the form of enclosed courtyards that being placed behind an impenetrable wall, give women the privacy needed to be outdoors without wearing the hijab (Howell & Tentokali, 1989; Rowe, 1989).

Apart from the overall house layout, constructing privacy extends to details like the misaligning of the doorways of neighboring houses, which are positioned so as when the doors are open, views into the other house are not possible (Rowe, 1989). Similarly, windows into the street are limited or they are architecturally treated so again, views into them are restricted. A common technique of controlling views into the house via the windows is the *mashrabiyya*, lattice woodwork screens, which guard families' and women's right to privacy, that is, the right 'to see' but not 'be seen.'

Of particular relevance to this study are the parallels between the veil and the *mashrabiyya* as noted by El Guindi who states that: "In many ways, veiling resembles a *mashrabiyya*; but whereas *mashrabiyya* is stationary, veiling is mobile, carrying women's privacy to public spaces" (1999, p.95). Indeed, El Guindi extols the veil's "dynamic flexibility" and "ability

for spontaneous manipulation and instant changing of form" (1999, p.97). She explains: "The faculty it offers of pull down to uncover or pull up to cover provides the wearer with the advantage of instant maneuvering" (1999, p.97). Further links between the veil and the *mashrabiyya* are brought to light by Kenzari's and Elsheshtawy's eloquent interpretation of these two cultural expressions as "crystallizations of transparency" (2003, p.24). Extrapolating their argument to spatiality, the authors premise is that "transparency is a property of a process rather than a material (2003, p.24) dependent on things like the position of the viewer. 'Unveiling' then, is as much about the power of a woman to lift the veil as it is about the spatial restrictions or barriers she may encounter in the process. Building off these discourses, this paper will further explore the relationship between the veil and domestic spaces by going beyond two-dimensional elements like the *mashrabiyya* to examine the three-dimensional abilities of these two cultural expressions to construct a sense of privacy, protection, and control. As we will see, in displacement, the dialectic between the veil and domestic spaces is closely tied to the lack of privacy.

Study's Purpose and Methodology

Data for this paper were collected as part of the University of Minnesota's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) in the fall of 2007. Ten interviews were conducted with Muslim veiled women (*mohajabe*) in their homes with the purpose of exploring how *mohajabe* Muslim women relate to their domestic environments, the place where the hijab can come off. With the interviewer being a Muslim

veiled woman herself, the study overcomes the common concern surrounding Middle Eastern studies of male researchers being disconnected from the female perspective (Keddie, 2002). On the other hand, one can easily argue that speaking to one of their own some women might have felt uncomfortable expressing views that could have been perceived as anti-veiling. Cognizant of this limitation and of the fact that the small sample is not representative of all Muslim women, the paper heavily relies on the experiences shared by the interviewees, seeing them as a starting point for getting a closer and deeper understanding of their viewpoints and needs.

Interviewees were asked to describe things like what the hijab means to them; how they use their current house and any concerns they might have; traditions they value and wish to pass down to their children; and their ideal housing conditions. Demographic characteristics were also collected along with plans of the homes and interior/exterior photographs.

Sample Description

Identified through contacts within the Muslim community of Middle-Eastern origin, the ten women interviewed were of diverse ages, educational backgrounds, income levels, and years in the U.S. Their ages ranged from 20 to 43 years old, the average being 29; all but one were/had received higher education; and their incomes ranged from less than \$20,000 to over \$100,000, with the average falling in the \$50,000 to \$60,000 income category. All women were married and their family sizes ranged from two to five people, with the average being three people. Five of the interviewees had no children, while the rest had between one and three children.

In terms of their occupation, one was a stay-at-home mom, three were working full-time, and six were university students. Reflecting the temporal dimensions of the veil's spatial implications, the time these women spent in their houses varied greatly—on average, excluding sleep time, the full-time workers spent about four hours inside their houses; students 10 hours, and the stay-home mom about 15 hours. Activities they engaged in while at home included cleaning, cooking, reading/studying, socializing, and watching television.

Eight of the ten interviewees lived in houses they owned while the other two rented, devoting more than 30 percent of their income on house payments or rent. Five resided in single-family detached homes, three in townhouses, and two in apartments with an average of three bedrooms and two bathrooms. All but one of the women interviewed lived in the suburbs of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area.

Most of the women (seven) were from Iran, one was from Palestine, one from Iraq, and one from the U.S. Those born outside the U.S. have lived in the country from a minimum of three to 24 years, with the average being 11 years. Their close connections to their homeland were evidenced by their frequent trips (either every year or every-other year) and the fact that four plan to go back after finishing their studies (another four plan to stay in the U.S. and two are unsure about their future plans).

All women wore the scarf-type of hijab which covers a woman's hair and, depending on the length, some of the body. Seven started wearing the veil when younger than 10, two between 11-14, and one between 26-29 years of age. All have family members who also wear

the veil and their parents/social expectations had an influence on their choice to be veiled. However, they also added that when they could think for themselves, they realized that they still wanted to keep the hijab on for its advantages and therefore, all women want to pass the hijab dress code down to their children.

Discussion – Practicing Veiling in Minnesota Homes

When introducing themselves to us, in addition to mentioning their name and educational level, most of the women we interviewed highlighted the fact that they were Muslims. Having set the frame around which the interview would be structured, these women ensured that we knew the importance of religion in shaping and forming their activities and lives. Communicating their Muslim identity was also very important to all of our interviewees (in a scale of 1 to 5, the

average was 4.7), who employed many forms of cultural expression in the process—be those decorating with framed verses of the Quran to praying five times a day (Figure 1). As our aim was to explore the spatial implications of veiling, we begin by elaborating on the reasons our interviewees cited for wearing the veil.

Reasons for Veiling

Showcasing her religion was one of the main reasons this 25 year-old woman chose to wear the hijab:

“I think I am special. My confidence has been raised to the sky because of wearing the veil. I am getting closer to God. It makes me a woman on a mission. It represents my religion. I know I am being watched and I need to behave nicely.”

Others, saw the opportunity to stand out in public as the key to acting as ambassadors for their cultural and religious groups because,



Figure 1: Carved wooden Islamic frame decorates the living room (Source: Authors).

as one interviewee stated: “We are the most misunderstood ethnic and religious group, and media portrayal of our lives and identities are unfairly negative and full of lies.” Another felt that she “wanted to reveal the true identity of Muslim people because everybody needs to know Muslims are good, and they need to trust us, because we are honest and trust worthy.”

For this woman, wearing the veil meant abiding by her religious beliefs as the hijab was a marker of her religious identity:

“Sometimes I think I like not to wear it, but I can’t because it’s not comfortable for me. It’s not comfortable because I feel so guilty about it in terms of doing something wrong for the religion. Maybe it’s a joke that I feel comfortable.”

Similar reasoning was expressed by a 24 year-old college student: “I love to show others that I am different. Hijab is one of the things that are in the Quran and we believe things that are in Quran are for our own good.”

Particularly intriguing to anyone studying space, what it means and how it is constructed, are the links between the veil and protection. As elaborated by this 42 year-old woman: “It’s a covering, it defines my religion, it covers me from everybody else.” A 22 year-old further explained: “It shows my identity and shows my boundary for strangers not to enter and gives me a kind of security that I could not otherwise find.”

Also fascinating is a perception of veiling that stands opposite to western conceptions of ‘covering’—by covering themselves, some women felt that they actually show more of themselves, and most importantly, they allow others to focus on what really matters. This

paradox, ‘covering as a means to show more,’ sounds uneasy to the western mind where ‘covering’ implies that something is hidden. A 43 year-old professor related that wearing the hijab increases the value of women in the eyes of men, helping them be recognized for their achievements. While describing what the hijab meant for her, she said: “It means that I can be respected for my intelligence and intellectual abilities and not for my body image. To me, it’s a sanctuary and female independence.”

Lastly, another dimension of veiling that is often misunderstood by the veil’s opponents is its association with freedom and ‘less to worry about.’ According to a 27 year-old from Iran:

“The hijab means a lot. It is a part of my identity. If I am forced to take it off, it will be very hard for me to function. It doesn’t limit me as a woman, I can function and do my daily activities. If I am going to work or to school, I don’t need to worry about how I look as far as my sexuality and body image goes in people’s minds. It is as if I am wearing ‘privacy’ while in public.”

Veiling then, is the purposive act of ‘building’ a ‘wall’ around one’s body that ensures a woman’s privacy. Acting as a means of control, the veil becomes the vehicle through which Muslim women negotiate between the self they show to others and their private self. Conceiving of the veil as a ‘boundary’ speaks to the veil’s spatiality and its ability to foster a sense of enclosure, one that engenders comfort, safety, security, and a sense of freedom, while forming and positioning a woman’s religious and cultural identity. Incidentally, all of these dimensions of meaning are also associated with domestic environments (Hayward, 1977; Moore, 2000), and therefore, the parallels between the two types of spatial constructors are beginning to

become evident. Below, we will delve deeper into exploring how domestic spaces impact the process of navigating between identities and between what it means to be veiled and unveiled.

Domestic Implications of Veiling

When asked what home means to her, a 27 year-old mother of two said: "It is somewhere safe, where I can be comfortable. I can breathe without anybody countering me. I am in control of everything." She paused and then added: "It's my territory." Another interviewee elaborated: "Home means a lot. Of course, it's a place to relax and keep your privacy, a place for gathering, fun, and family activities. It's a place to express your likes... sense of style; because you are the master of the house, you have your freedom. You can do anything you want." These meanings of home were jeopardized though when domestic interior and exterior spaces were not supportive of the veiling tradition.

Meeting their privacy needs was among the reasons many interviewees cited for liking their house—from the fact that spatial division allowed for gender separation during gatherings to the large windows that enriched the interiors with natural views and sunlight while blocking neighbors' views into the home. On the opposite end, the difficulties some encountered due to living in the U.S. related to homes not supporting their privacy needs. These difficulties were exacerbated by temporal factors like the fact that half of our interviewees spent much of the day in the home, often caring for children, caring for the home by cooking and cleaning, socializing, but also reading and working on the computer. All of the women noted that privacy

in the home was extremely important to them and it extended to both outsiders and family members. As a 27 year-old who has lived in the U.S. for a little over six years explained:

"Privacy is important because living in America [means] there are [still] certain norms that you need to practice. Because when I am home, I can truly be who I am, I need to have privacy to maintain who I am. So, provide spaces at home where I can be who I am, dress however I want and talk about whatever I want."

Among the spatial implications of privacy, the open plans prevalent in new construction are probably the design characteristic of their homes that most interviewees had trouble with. The typical open-plan kitchens for example, created difficulties for some women as they had to keep their hijabs on when guests were over, making cooking and serving male guests both dangerous and uncomfortable (Figure 2). This situation was even more stressful due to the fact that most of our interviewees preferred to provide all the food during social gatherings. Characteristics of cooking spaces they felt would account for comfort and privacy included enclosed kitchens, even if it meant separating the kitchen from the dining room with a curtain.

Apart from spatial division and placement, the size of spaces also impacted some of our interviewees' activities in the home. When guests visit, typically, gender separation rules take effect. Having two large separate spaces to accommodate the two groups is ideal for a pleasant gathering. If the house does not allow for complete separation, then women and men will end up creating their own circles in one large space, which implies though that



Figure 2: An open kitchen restrains a woman's ability to be unveiled (Source: Authors).

all women will have to remain veiled during the socializing hours.

Spatial divisions must extend to both the horizontal and vertical directions. Having two stories, with the bedrooms upstairs and the kitchen/dining/living room downstairs, was preferable to some women as most often, the second floor is not accessed by guests. According to a 22 year-old, "Bedrooms upstairs are easy and provide a space to take off your hijab and breath." In such cases though, an unveiled woman should be able to access all needed spaces. The placement of the staircase must then enable her to go to the second floor without being seen both from inside and outside the house. In typical

American homes however, openness guides the design of entry areas and staircases are in many cases located by the front entrance. This is contrary to Islamic spatiality that conceives of the entrance, the threshold, as marking the transition from the public to the private domain and as having religious significance. According to Eliade (1959, p.25), the threshold is "the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds -- and at the same time paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred becomes possible." A 27 year-old mother of two explained the limitations she encounters because of her lack of control of the threshold:

“Something else that I don’t like is that if someone knocks on the door, I have to walk in front of the door in order to go upstairs and wear my scarf, and they can see me while I go upstairs. So, what’s the point if they can see me? I wish I had a door with a little eye.....There is an issue with American houses....In Saudi Arabia, there is a different door for guests so that they can’t go through the house. Let’s say I have some guests and I want to sneak out, I can’t because they will see me” (Figure 3 & 4).



Figure 3: Accessing the stair has no privacy due to sidelights of main entrance (Source: Authors).

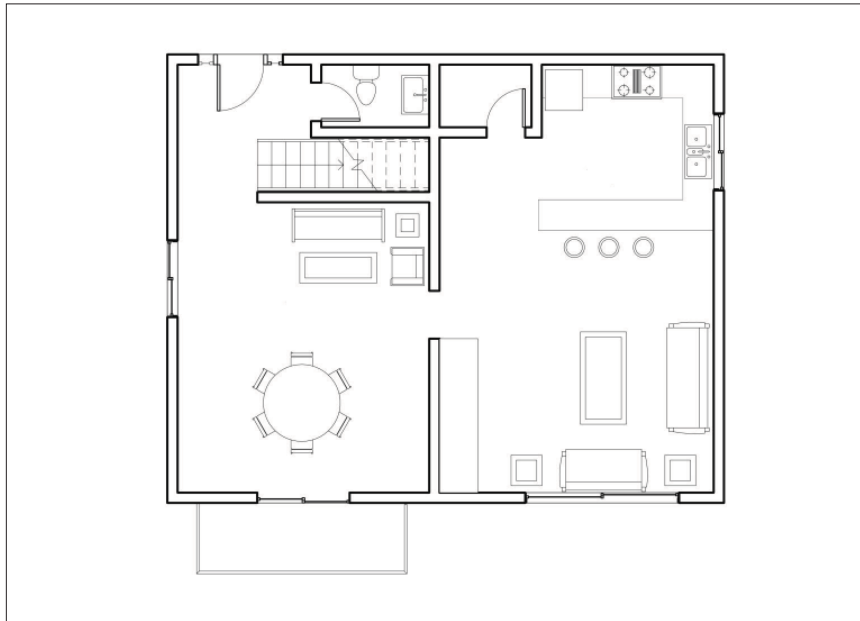


Figure 4: Floor Plan of the house (Source: Authors).

Connections to the outdoors were additional factors that impacted the well-being of some of the women we spoke with. All of them liked having big windows that allowed for sunlight and natural views. However, to maintain their privacy when unveiled, eight of our interviewees relied primarily on curtains or blinds that darkened the interiors and cut off all outside views. Solutions to this problem include using opaque glass; ensuring that windows are not aligned and do not face those of neighboring homes; spacing houses further apart (enough to prevent views into another home); and using greenery to screen views.

Many of our interviewees also valued private

backyards—when asked about characteristics of their houses back in their home countries which they would like their house in the U.S. to have, most mentioned enclosed backyards. These are domestic open spaces where veiled women can take off their hijabs and enjoy the feeling of sunlight and wind in the privacy of their own home. According to a 22 year-old, in her house in Iran: “We had a hayat [backyard] that had tall walls all around and we had a hoze [traditional pool with a low level fountain] and a variety of trees.” The semi-private green spaces surrounding typical American suburban homes can transform into private backyards by means of tall walls or fences and dense plants as well as techniques such as keeping backyards from facing each other and



Figure 5: Porch is open to views from neighboring homes (Source: Authors).

placing homes as further apart as possible. Similar programmatic requirements can carry over into porches, additional outdoor spaces that can account for privacy from the gaze of outsiders, the wish of a 43 year-old who explained that: “When I sit on my porch, I have to wear the hijab and that is very uncomfortable. I’m in my home and I am fully dressed!” (Figure 5).

Closing Comments

Through interviews with ten mohajabe women this study explored the spatial implications of the veil. The findings show parallels between the veil and domestic environments as both serve as spatial enclosures that construct a woman’s identity and provide women with privacy, protection, and a sense of control. The veil’s spatiality takes the form of a flexible, portable, or mobile enclosure, it is ‘a house on the move,’ one that endows women with the privacy they need while in public spaces. Homes, on the other hand, places where women can be unveiled, are complementary forms of enclosure that enable Muslim women to navigate between a public and a more private self, reconciling in the process tradition and modernity.

What was fascinating in this study was witnessing how a seemingly ‘fixed’ space, like a domestic environment that is determined by fixed walls, floors, and ceilings, attained in the hands of these women ‘moldable’ qualities. Much like the veil, a home’s spatiality was maneuvered by women to meet their privacy needs. A space typically devoted to the dining room was transformed into a sitting area for guests so that the woman could cook unveiled in an open-plan kitchen; curtains were pulled down when needed for privacy (Figure 6); plants and

other trees screened views between homes of neighbors (Figure 7).



Figure 6: Keeping the blinds down for privacy (Source: Authors).

In their three-dimensionality then, residential spaces are much like the veil: dynamic, flexible, and adaptable forms that can be, to some extent, creatively manipulated and molded to meet Islamic societal expectations. Through both the veil and domestic spaces, the Muslim women we spoke with navigate between varying degrees of privacy, between being veiled and unveiled, as well as between roles



Figure 7: Dense greenery blocks views to the inside (Source: Authors).

such as being safekeepers of tradition and modern gender definitions.

At the same time though, some of these mohajabe women found themselves in a residential architecture that was often unsupportive of their particular needs. The open kitchens prevalent in mainstream American suburban housing prevented some from cooking unveiled, making cooking dangerous and uncomfortable. Similarly, the open plans of the homes limited their movements when male guests were visiting, forcing them to be veiled while inside their own residences. Women also felt restricted from using outdoor spaces like yards and porches due to the fact

that they had to be veiled. The difficulties they faced contradicted with the idea of home as a place “where you can do anything you want,” creating stress in their lives.

Culturally sensitive solutions that support the veiling tradition include closed-off and separated kitchens; separate spaces for men and women to socialize; deeper and further apart houses that provide more privacy; plans that separate the intimate areas such as bedrooms and restrooms by means of hallways and floor levels, allowing women to move around and perform their tasks while having unrelated male guests over; locating stairs so that women can access the upper level without

being seen; windows that screen views into/ and from the houses of neighbors; and outdoor spaces that are private.

As the paper stated from the beginning, the veil is engulfed in controversy. Completing this study automatically makes the authors part of the debate: Are the proposed culturally sensitive solutions about the women's right to 'see' and 'not be seen' or are they about seclusion and subordination? Adopting these solutions engages designers in discourses where they must defend their decisions around religious choices and social standings in a secular country like the U.S. How far should designers go when responding to the needs of users? Where do they draw the line between respecting a cultural tradition and all its implications and positioning their designs in the future?

In closing, reflecting on modernization processes that change boundaries between nations and cultures, one cannot help but wonder if veiling as a cultural and religious identity constructor will be a part of the past. In our sample, aside from the women's dress, we did not witness traditional gender roles among the families we interviewed. In the households we visited, both men and women cooked and helped with household tasks, such as cooking and cleaning and many of the veiled women we spoke to were professionals and financially independent. The dress' ties to religion and identity though, signal that it might be a long-lasting practice. The implications then of this study for architects and interior designers include asking questions about how to increase awareness about cultural aspects of space and how to help contribute to the diversity of experiences that enrich our world and support well-being. Future research

can further explore the needs of many other ethnic and minority groups. In the meantime, design educators can spread the word about cultural differences, offering courses in which students can familiarize themselves with the particularities surrounding the lives of religious, cultural, and ethnic minority groups. Thinking about how to work toward culturally sensitive designs is a start.

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Notes

1. The 2000 U.S. census shows 283,225 people as having been born in Iran. The same census also states that in 2000, 18 percent of the total population aged 5 and over, or 47.0 million people, reported they spoke a language other than English at home, 600,000 of them speaking Arabic.

2. See Waines (1982) for an excellent description of Islamic law and all that it entails.

3. As the paper's focus is the spatiality of veiling, it is beyond the scope of the paper to elaborate on the veiling debate. For a thorough discussion see Bullock (2002), El Guindi (1999), and Scott (2007).

3. Fashion designers, like Miuccia Prada, who is searching for ways to gain "more power for women," argue for the "Muslimification" of fashion: "In the end, we designers are really just looking for a new way to dress...The super-exposure of nudity seems not to have given much happiness to women" (Betts, 2006). What western architects and interior designers can learn from the veiling tradition remains to be seen.

4. Although the paper focuses on veiled Muslim women, it should be noted that Islam prescribes that men also cover themselves and dress modestly. Here is the verse in the Quran: "Say to the believing men, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts; that is purer for them. Allah is aware of the things they work" (Quran, 24:30).

6. In the U.S., veiling is not regulated and therefore, the paper's references to veiling are a reflection of a woman's right to choose. However, the political manifestations of veiling vary tremendously in both western and Muslim countries. While in Turkey, a Muslim nation, female government employees are prohibited from wearing headscarves and veils, in countries like Saudi Arabia, all women must be fully veiled when in public spaces. Among western nations, in 2004, the French government instituted a ban on the wearing of 'conspicuous signs' of religious affiliation in public schools, which to many, is aimed at Muslim girls wearing headscarves, criticized as another way by which France is failing to integrate its former colonial subjects as full citizens (Scott, 2007).

7. For a detailed description of women's role as keepers of the Muslim religious rituals in the home see Mazumdar & Mazumdar (2004).

8. Although all of our interviewees feel comfortable with the veil even though they stand out in public, other studies showed that standing out amounted to racial abuse by non-Muslims (Franks, 2000).

9. The idea of the veil as protection is evident in films like Eva Mulvad's 'Enemies of Happiness,' which documents Malalai Joya's campaign for Afganistan's National Assembly. Here, both Malalai and the Danish filmmakers relied on the burka for their safety in the public.

10. Let's keep in mind that as veiled women are always covered when outdoors in public areas, the only place they can feel the sun and wind is in the privacy of their home.

Samaneh Vahaji,

Samaneh Vahaji, an Iranian living in Minneapolis since 2003, is a Masters of Architecture student at the University of Minnesota. She holds a Bachelor of Design in architecture from the same university. Being a Muslim, veiled woman herself, Ms. Vahaji is interested in devising ways by which to integrate cultural aspects of space in architectural practice.

Tasoulla Hadjiyanni

Tasoulla Hadjiyanni is an Assistant Professor in the Interior Design program of the University of Minnesota. She holds a Bachelor of Architecture and a Master of Science in Urban Development and Management from Carnegie Mellon University as well as a PhD in Housing Studies from the University of Minnesota, which led to her book "The Making of a Refugee: Children Adopting Refugee Identity in Cyprus." She is now continuing to explore the dynamic among design, culture, and identity under conditions of displacement with refugee and minority groups in Minnesota. Her scholarship has been featured in interdisciplinary journals and edited books as well as presented at international conferences.