Negotiating Modern Islamic Identity:
The Political and Sociological Dynamics
of Niqabis In Indonesia and Egypt

Alimatul Qibtiyah
UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
alimatul.qibtiyah@uin-suka.ac.id

Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin
UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
ruhainidz@yahoo.com

Naïma Bouras
CEDEJ (the French Centre for Economic, Judicial, and Social Studies
and Documentation, in Cairo, Egypt)

naima.bouras@yahoo.fr

Noorkamilah
UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
noorkamilah@uin-suka.ac.id

Abstract

Type the Arab Springs and the rise of Daesh in Syria and Iraq
gave the niqabi women a special stand and visibility they never
had before. Some niqabis women became visible sharing during
their public activities. The civil societies in Egypt and Indonesia
started to shape new calls to ban niqâb and presented it as a
danger to the country. In both countries' controversy has been

raised among Islamic mass organizations and universities. The Salafi doctrine which controls women to cover their face increased in Egypt by the 70' and in Indonesia during the 90'. This research focuses on how niqabis negotiate their modern identities in Indonesia and Egypt. It used a mixed method and uses surveys, in-depth interviews (life stories), and focus group discussions in Indonesia and Egypt from June to November 2018. It can be concluded that there are variations in niqabis' motivations to wear niqab, according to the way they negotiate their existences in an unsupportive environment, and the challenge they might face. There is no single interpretation of the existence of niqabis. The complexity of their lives has been influenced by the way they were raised, the resources (book/media) they read/received, and the state policies implemented in the places they live.

Keywords: Niqab, Egypt, Indonesia, Identity, Negotiation

A. Introduction

The construction of a national identity is often a matter of negotiation within different groups that constitute society, be they religious or secular. The more diverse the local identities are, the more complex and intense the negotiation. One of the more visible symbols in the portrayal of national identity is how Indonesian and Egyptian Muslim women dress. Niqab (referred to as cadar in Indonesia), which covers the entire face except the eyes, is a dress style of Muslim women, and has become a new phenomenon among the modern people, notably sparking controversy within society throughout the last decade.

In Indonesia, some historians (Andaya 2006) report that during the seventeenth century, Makassar used to shelter women wearing the veil. It was worn by noble women and was not commonly adopted by Javanese women until 'Aisyiyah, one of the biggest Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia until today, established in 1917 (Chandraningrum 2013); (Yunesti 2014). The practice of veiling in the Soeharto era (1966-1998) was flavored

by strict state control on religious appearance. The banning of student veiling was based on Decree [*Surat Keputusan*] No. 052.C/Kep/D/82. The issue boomed in the reformation era and in 1991 the government allowed veiling for women at school based on Decree 100/c/kep/D/91 (Qibtiyah 2014).

Since around 2012, long veil in Indonesia have become popular and some groups claim to wear *Jilbab syar'i* or islamic veil. But for some, the long veil is not enough, and in the last two years the number of Muslim women wearing niqab has increased. In 2017 it sparked controversy among Islamic mass organizations and in Islamic universities. One of the products of the patriarchal structure of the Salafi movement for women is obliging women to wear niqab and its variations, including the burqa (McLarney 2009). A common assumption is that men usually have privilege and dominant positions as well as power, including the power to force women to wear the niqab (Hasan 2006); (Knutilla 2004); (Hasan 2006).

Research conducted by Eva F. Nisa (Nisa 2012) found that many parents were shocked when their daughters decided to wear niqab. They felt it was like a slap in the face. This case is similar to the responses of parents whose daughters chose to wear hijab in the 1980s (Brenner 1996). Furthermore, Nisa explains that parents perceive that their niqabi daughters will experience difficulties in her future career and her marriage, because many people stigmatize them as terrorists.

> It includes their assumption that wearing the cadar may hinder their daughter's future career and marriage prospects. One important difference from previous objections to wearing the jilbab is the issue of terrorism. This is linked to the stigma around cadari (not jilbaber or a woman who wears a jilbab) in Indonesia according to which they are considered as potential terrorists or part of terrorist networks. Therefore, parents usually ask their daughters not to wear the cadar when they return home

to the *kampung* (village) to prevent rumours. The most difficult moment for many parents is when their daughter asks their permission to quit university because the faculty does not accept wearing the cadar (Nisa 2012, 372).

Based on those negative assumptions about niqabis, Egyptian and Indonesian governments and civil societies become worried about the increased wearing of the niqab in the countries, denouncing a dress coming from abroad, which is not rooted in their culture and inherited belief system. In Egypt, the veil, hijab or niqab has become popular among Muslims since the 70s (with the Sahwa Islamiyah, the Islamic Revival). After the death of Nasser in Egypt, the succeeding president induced a new political trend. "Sadat adopts a *laissez-faire* policy toward religious and religious activity" (Al-Guindi 1984). Jamaat Islamiyah (Islamic associations) promoted religious dress for women first within universities, that increasingly welcomed women increasingly.

Women who embraced Salafi doctrine started to wear niqab to distinguish themselves from other Islamic Sunni trends, showing a deeper devotion and involvement in the way they practiced their religiosity. The niqab dress started to become more common in the Egyptian public space with the democratization of the Salafi discourse - during the 80s and early 90s. Niqabi women became incrementally involved in the religious field, due to the increasing occupation of Salafi movements within the preaching field. The issue of the veil was central to the religious debates of the 70s and 80s. However, the debate over the veil had in fact been a topic of discussion since the late 19th and early 20th century. Women concerned by the veil were, hence, from high social classes, and the veil itself was different from the traditional Islamic one. It was a veil of modesty more than a veil showing religious piety.

The niqab in Egypt would become more visible during the 2011 Arab Spring and due to the Salafi movement's role in the process of democratic transition, Salafi women shifted their strategy from Salafi preaching to political preaching (Bouras 2017). Anabel Inge, in *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman*, explains that the ideal female dress for Salafis involves wearing the niqab (Inge 2017). After the ouster of the Brotherhood's regime and the demonization campaign of the Islamist (by the Egyptian media), Egyptian niqabis started to become worried in the public space. Tension and conflicting ideologies among women in Egypt increased (Arlene). The widespread issue of ISIS in the Sinai, as well as the radicalization of a portion of the Egyptian Brotherhood (following the severe military repression) entailed a negative media coverage of the niqabis, accusing of contributing to society's ills. Nadia explains that after the events of 2013 she was worried when walking in the streets. Some of her niqabi friends took it off because they felt insecure in a public space that had become hostile to them (Nadia 2018). For the first time in decades, Niqabi dress was to be associated with the country's instability and terrorist attacks. Niqabis/cadaris in Indonesia have had to face the same negative stigma.

The two case studies chosen for this project allow us to examine the dynamics of veiling practices in societies with different structures of Islamic authority. We approach each case through three levels of analysis: the state, civil society, and the individual. In Indonesia, the government's Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) plays a significant role in the religious lives of its citizens. But for Indonesian citizens—especially those on the island of Java—the most important sources of Islamic authority are the Islamic civil society organizations (*ormas*) Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. In Egypt, official Islamic authority is centralized under the state-affiliated al-Azhar University, but this used to be contested by multiple Islamic associations, most noticeably the Muslim Brotherhood and the loosely

grouped Salafis. In each of these two distinct Muslim-majority settings, we are interested in assessing how well-educated urban professionals negotiate their existing identity as niqabis into 1) the mainstream culture that does not agree with the way they dress, 2) the institutions in which they work or study, 3) global political discourse on extremism and terrorism, and 4) private relations with partners, relatives, and neighbours. This research also investigates how niqabis receive and engage with religious ideas propagated by these different sources of authority. Do individual Muslims consciously choose between contending sources of authority, or might they even claim interpretative authority for themselves?

Based on this background, it is interesting to investigate the dynamics of the political and sociological aspects surrounding the issue of veiling, especially the niqab. What is the motivation? How do niqabis negotiate their identity relating to mainstream cultures, occupation, nationality, and the issue of terrorism? What are the biggest challenges they face?

Negotiation always means compromise and creativity. It is a process in which people learn to accept an available compromise as a satisfactory substitute for that which they thought they really wanted (Roos 2006). Ross defines negotiation as:

> the sum of all the ways in which we convey information about what we want, what we desire, and what we expect from other people-as well as how we receive information about other people's wants. desires, and expectation (Roos 2006).

Many studies have been done on veiling. But there is a lack of research about the niqab in Indonesia and Egypt. One project conducted by Inger Furseth found that veiling women argue that veiling is a religious obligation, signals religious identity,

and relates to gendered space (the public and domestic spheres), male sexuality, and individual freedom (Furseth 2006).

According to Saba Mahmood, women's veiling is an expression of piety (Mahmood 1962). In the Indonesian context, Dewi Chandraningrum (Chandraningrum 2013) found that veiling is not only related to religion but also to politics, economy, and sexuality. Eva F. Nisa reveals that niqabis among university students struggle to reconstruct their religious identity and their capacity for exercising a specific type of religious agency (Nisa 2012). Furthermore, she found that parents worried about their daughter's decision to wear niqab. The veil is considered a modern construct evolving from a political and legal jurisdiction which covers diverse ethnicities, faiths and cultures. It is the subject of contestation and negotiation. Identity is in 'the constant making' (Parekh 2008). Gramsci in Larrain (Larrain 1979) argued that collectiveness could be strongly upheld by a coercive measure or a hegemonic dominance, but will abruptly collapse. Contestation and negotiation feature as dynamic process of identity in the making. It is imperative for a collectiveness such as a nation to constantly experience contestation through a margin of appreciation to arrive at the minimal common ground for coexistence. Judith Butler, in her concept of "performativity", explains that creating identity goes beyond language and includes not only speech, but also conventions, how they look as well as adopted attitudes and gestures (Butler 1990).

This research combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was collected from closed-ended questionnaires, life stories, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD). Selective memory and the synthesizing nature of life stories lead us beyond facts to their meanings, which are particularly useful in studies of worldviews (Furseth 2006). The life stories used here cover entire lifespans and additionally deal with more thematic issues relating to religion and niqab.

The research steps included framing and identifying a theoretical framework, developing research instruments, collecting data, reporting findings, and disseminating results. This research was conducted for six months, and its respondents represent niqabis, the elites in the government and civil society, and religious and cultural leaders from two countries, Indonesia and Egypt. This research was conducted collaboratively with the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo, Egypt. Closed-ended questionnaires and life stories were used to explore the motives, thought, and normative work relating to niqab and the ideal Muslim woman's dress for *Niqabis*. Semi structured interviews were used for the government and civil society elites and religious and cultural leaders in two selected countries. FGDs were implemented with civil society groups such as Islamic mass organizations and universities in Indonesia (Nahdatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Islamic State University). 292 Niqabis have participated (87 from Cairo and 205 from Indonesia-Yogyakarta, NTB, Lampung, Surabaya, and Indonesia-Cairo). There were 27 niqabis selected to be interviewed in-depth using the life story technique (Cairo 6, Indonesia 14). 23 figures participated in interviews and FGDs (6 Cairo, 17 Indonesia), including politicians, women activists, academicians, government employees, and religious leaders. To keep confidentiality of respondents, all niqabis' names mentioned in this report have been changed.

B. Discussion

1. Social Backgrounds of Respondents

There is a variety of social backgrounds pertaining to niqabis from Indonesia and Egypt. Almost 30% are from Egypt, and the rest are from Indonesia. The majority of respondents are students (91%) and their ages range from 18 to 30 years old. Before talking about motivation, we report respondents' ages when they started wearing niqab. There is quite a difference in

respondents' ages between Egypt and Indonesia. Around 43% of the Egyptian niqabis we surveyed started to wear niqab at the age of 10-15. Whereas Indonesian niqabis began in that age range at only 8%. This means that in Egypt, niqab is culturally embedded, whereas in Indonesia it is a current phenomenon. In contrast, many Indonesian niqabis (65%) started to wear niqab around the age of 16-21.

2. Motivation

As for the reasons for wearing niqab, there are various types of motivations. From survey and in-depth interview data, it appears that there are four major motivations: (1) obey Islamic teachings; (2) protect the body (both physically and psychologically); (3) traumatic experiences in the past, and (4) other motivations (such as spiritual experiences, dreams, and comfort). Based on survey data, it can be seen on table 1 that the motives of most niqabis for covering their face, both in Egypt (93.1%) and Indonesia (66.3%), is to obey Islamic teachings. However, Indonesian niqabis' motivations for wearing niqab vary.

Table 1. Motivation for Wearing Niqab

Motivation	Country	
	Egypt (n=87)	Indonesia(n=205)
No Answer	1.1	.5
Obey Islamic Teaching	93.1	66.3
Protect the body	0	2.9
Sad experience in the past	0	4.9
More than one motivation	0	2.3
Others	5.7	21
Total	100.0	100.0

In-depth interview data is in line with the survey data, showing that there are more than 5 motivations for wearing

niqab: (1) to obey Islamic teachings; (2) to protect the body, both physically and psychologically; (3) sad experience in the past; and (4) to accommodate other reasons such as comfort, fear of death, dreams, and to protect her memorization of the Qur'an.

The first motivation to wear niqab is to obey Islamic teachings. As reported by Safiya, a teacher at an Al-Azhar student dormitory: "Actually I wore niqab not because it is obligatory or sunnah, but it was my way to get closer to God" (Safiya 2018). The same reason was stated by Maye, a student at Al-Azhar University: "First, for Allah. second, for imitating the wifes of the prophet. And third, for my family" (Maye 2018). Imitating the Prophet's wives was also a reason stated by Lateefa: "I wear niqab because I read in some books that the Prophet`s wives wore niqab" (Lateefa 2018). In line with that, respondents from Lampung, Mala also stated that: "niqab is sunnah" (Mala 2018). Santi, another respondent from Lampung, Indonesia said: "The law of wearing the veil is mandatory, because it's the best, be the honourable" (Santi 2018). This attitude is in line with their belief that niqab is a religious teaching. Many respondents consider niqab as a religious teaching, both in Egypt and Indonesia (see Table 2).

Table 2. Niqab is not religious teaching.

Niqab is not religious teaching	Country	
	Egypt (n=87)	Indonesia (n=205)
No Answer	1.1	.5
Strongly Disagree	83.9	57.6
Disagree	13.8	36.6
Agree	0	3.9
Strongly Agree	1.1	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0

The second motivation for wearing niqab is to protect the body, whether from pollution (physically) or from strange men's

gazes (psychologically). Quoting Rana: "…I want to protect myself because nowadays most of men gaze at a woman's posture" (Rana 2018). In line with Rana, Ida said that: "I can protect myself from men who are not my mahram" (Ida 2018). A similar motivation is shared by a student in Lombok, Zara. After seeing a friend who wears niqab, she looks different. My friends who wear *syar'i hijab* still do not keep distance from men, [as they continue doing things] such as joking and touching. Whereas niqabis are different, not touching and keeping a distance (Zara 2018). Bia, an Indonesian student in Egypt, says:

> I used to like make-up so much, wearing jeans, and a small hijab. When I interacted with men, I used to laugh out loudly. Someday I thought that by wearing niqab I would be more safe and would not experience sexual abuse on the bus and in public roads (Bia 2018).

Third, some are motivated to wear niqab because of sad experiences in their pasts. The researchers did not find many reports about sad experiences from in-depth interviews. Only one niqabi reported that she had had an unpleasant experience in the past. Dida shared that: "when I was in senior high school, I got abused sexually, then I decided to wear niqab" (Dida 2018). An unpleasant experience was also shared by Ama, "I am an Indonesian student in Egypt, when I pass on public roads there were men who tease me, and my friend was also almost touched. Because of that, for my safety I decided to wear niqab" (Ama 2018). The fourth reason is trying to accommodate other motivations, such as comfort, fear of death, dreams, and protection of memorization of the Qur'an. Quoting Nindi: "actually because my clothes were less polite, then when I was hanging out, I saw people wearing niqab that look so comfortable. I want to be like her" (Nindi 2018). Zia and Anis stated: I was also afraid of people who wear niqab. But after interacting directly, one of them was my *Ustadzah* in an Islamic boarding school which

specifically studied *tahsin* (memorizing the Qur'an), Arabic and *kitab* (Islamic classic books). When I look at her, she has a special aura, very calm and pleasant (Zia 2018).

There are many Indonesian friends who wear niqab. They are also memorizers of the Qur'an [hafizah]. When I was in the process of memorizing the Qur'an, my mother's relative suggested me to wear niqab (Anis 2018). Other niqabis decided to wear niqab for several reason, such as dreams and fear of death. For example:

> I heard from my uncle that women who leave the house without wearing a headscarf commit sin, even though men look at us without lust, then I thought about how I could change. One day I dreamed I was prostrating in front of the Ka'bah but could not get up from my prostration (Anonim 2018).

I used to dislike the niqab because I thought it would interfere with breathing. But one day I went to the area in Matruh and played a game in which our whole bodies got covered with sand except the head. My mother and friend were very happy, while I remembered death and become afraid. Then I prayed a lot and finally I wore niqab (Shani 2018).

Some Egyptian niqabis wear niqab because they simply like it. As Neith stated: "I like it" (Neith 2018). Umi, a student from Lombok who decided to wear niqab with her friend, "our clothes were not syar'i, so we started to look for informations on google and in books, but the short videos on YouTube were about hijrah" (Umi 2018).

3. Negotiating Identity

Niqabis' responses to challenges they face vary, relating to their role/position in their families, societies, workplaces, as well as when others stereotype them as terrorists, as part of a

global political phenomenon. Regarding the family members that oppose the niqab, niqabis try to negotiate with them by giving explanations, convincing them that there is no problem with the niqab, and showing that niqab will have a good impact on their behavior (*akhlakul karima*). As stated by Umi: "I will convince them. It is not as they imagined. Insha Allah, about the bad thoughts or gossip about niqab, Insha Allah I can overcome it" (Umi 2018). Ida from Lombok also said that: "the important thing is that I have permission from my parents and the people closest to me, that's enough" (Ida 2018). In line with them, Mala also stated that her father forbade her to wear niqab in the bank office because his worried that She would have trouble dealing with staff and other customers in the bank (Mala 2018). Some Egyptian niqabis also faced the same thing, but as time goes by their families tend to accept the niqab with conditions, as stated by respondents:

> my father ignored me for a couple days. I went to my grandmother`s house and bought a niqab, and now it`s over. However, my father has given me big responsibilities consequently for wearing niqab. I`m prohibited to laugh in the street. I must behave more politely (Lateefa 2018).

Nubia talked her different experiences. Her family used to be happy that she was wearing a hijab and Later she decided to wear niqab. Her family supported her decision and left her to choose her own decision. Nubia stated by wearing niqab She no longer go back and forth between wearing hijab and not (Nubia 2018).

Another niqabis in Egypt, Shafiya, stated her family rejection because of wearing niqab. They worried about her future (Safiya 2018). Niqabis family's assume that the niqab is extreme and excessive.. Her mother who was against it at first said: "if you really want to be trusted to wear the niqab it must properly reflect the person wearing the niqab" (Anonim-2 2018).

In their neighborhoods, societies, and workplaces/schools, there are two main choices faced by niqabis. They can obey the rule that forbids the niqab or choose to leave their work/school. Among those who obey the rule, some niqabis obey the rule totally and the other niqabis obey with certain conditions. Neith, a niqabi who works as physician in Egypt, is one example of a niqabi who follows the institution's rule totally. She reported:

a year ago I went to Saudi Arabia [in the airport] and they asked me to take off niqab... I take it off. It's okay. They needed to see my face for security reasons, it's okay. Even when the reason is not security, for example if it's forbidden in some place and I need to go, I will take it off. I wear it for sunnah and for myself. The Prophet said "illa al-wajh wal kaffain" [women *aura* is all the body, except face and wrist], so it's okay" (Neith 2018).

One example of a niqabi who follows the institution's rule to take it off under certain conditions is Maya (Maya 2018) a teacher in a modern Islamic school in Yogyakarta. She will take her niqab off at school, and if she has to pass male students or male teachers, she will cover her face with a mask. Other niqabis who work or study in institutions that do not allow niqab choose to leave. Some Indonesian niqabis stated that they will not take off their niqab. According to Nindy, it is better not to have a job or income than to have to take off her niqab (Nindi 2018). One niqabi from Lombok also stated, "If there was a service or if I had to teach at a school that did not allow [teachers] to wear the niqab, it would be better if I leave and do not teach there. Maybe I can find another school or place that accepts the niqab" (Siti 2018). Like Siti (a niqabi from Indonesia), Maye, a niqabi from Egypt also stated that she will not take off her niqab. Maye reported: "I will never take off my niqab. In America there only few Muslims and niqabis are weird, but there is no need for me to remove my niqab" (Maye 2018).

Not everyone accepts the niqab, including some Islamic organizations. Niqabis in Egypt and Indonesia respond similarly,

choosing to be silent and ignore it. Quoting Zia: "I don't really think about it. Even if it's not accepted, I will take it easy" (Zia 2018). In line with Zia, an Egyptian niqabi stated that: I just let them have their opinion. I show them that I`m better now by wearing niqab. I behave more politely; I avoid things that are not good such as excessive joking, excessive laughing; and I am more responsible (Lateefa 2018).

When niqabis are asked about their confidence in public spaces, both in Indonesia and Egypt, most niqabis (around 76%) are confident even in an environment that does not support the niqab. However, Egyptian niqabis are more confident than Indonesians. Approximately 55.2% of Egyptian niqabis disagree that they are not confident in an environment that does not support the niqab. Whereas only 19% of Indonesian niqabis do not agree that they are not confident in an environment that does not support the niqab.

In response to husbands who forbid them to wear niqab, there are two main types: (1) to leave the husband and (2) obey him. Examples of the first response can be found in Maye, Lateefa, and Shani's reports: "I will leave him, because once I put niqab on, it's *haram* (forbidden) to take it off (Maye 2018). When he proposed to me, he has to see my face in front of my father. After marriage if he asks me to take off my niqab I will make him accept my niqab, and if he refuses I will leave him (Lateefa 2018). At that time, I was not married. My family asked me to take off my niqab to find a husband. I said no and I told them that whoever wants marry me should accept me as a niqabi (Shani 2018).

The decision of the Egyptian niqabis appears to be more subjective, handle and individualized. This can be explained by the fact that in Egypt, niqab dress is more rooted and accepted within the Egyptian society. Wearing Niqab grants Egyptian niqabis a bigger legitimation to act, to be mobile in public spaces and to be listened to and respected within the family unit. The dress has a strong connotation related to righteousness; piety

and virtue, contrary to the simple veil which is more related to modesty and decency. The rhetoric blaming niqabis in Egypt of being potential terrorists is something very new in the social behavior. To understand this shift, one has to come back to the 2011-2012 period during which the Salafiyât became more visible, participating in the demonstrations against the old regime and the electoral process where they applied for seats next to new Salafi political parties (Bouras 2017).

Different from Egyptian niqabis' responses, Indonesian niqabis (Rana and Zia) were willing to obey their husbands if they wanted her to take it off. "If my future husband doesn't allow me to wear niqab, I will take it off because obeying one's husband is more important" (Rana 2018). Before getting marriage, I will give conditions he must give permission to wear niqab, but if indeed my parents ask me to marry a man and he asks me to take off my niqab, I will obey him (Zia 2018).

In response to institution's rules to take the niqab off, a majority of both Egyptian (78%) and Indonesian (70%) niqabis have similar pattern, rejecting the institution's rules. This means they will not take the niqab off, even though the institutions want them to do so. In contrast, regarding a husband's disapproval, most Egyptian niqabis (90%) said that they would not agree to take their niqab off, while around 75% of Indonesian niqabis said they would obey their husband and take off the niqab (see table 3).

Table 3. Responses in Unsupportive Environments

Obey institution's rules to take the niqab off		Obey husband's favour to Take off niqab	
Egypt (n=87)	Indonesia (n=205)	Egypt (n=87)	Indonesia (n=205)

No Answer	1.1	1.5	1.1	1.4
Strongly Disagree	59.8	30.2	70.1	9.8
Disagree	27.6	39.0	19.5	14.1
Agree	5.7	23.9	4.6	60.0
Strongly Agree	5.7	5.4	4.6	14.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Niqabis also have different responses to stereotypes about terrorism. However, most of them, both in Egypt or Indonesia, disagree with the notion that the difference between hijabis and niqabis is extremist ideology. They also disagreed with the idea that terrorists wear niqab. This means they disagree with the assumption that the niqab is related to terrorism. This research reveals that only about 6% of Egyptian and 8% of Indonesian niqabis agree and strongly agree that the difference between hijabis and niqabis is extremist ideology. When asked about the notion that terrorists wear niqab, both in Egypt and Indonesia approximately 1% agree.

Relating to accusations that niqabis are terrorists, in-depth interview data show three reactions: (1) they fight back; (2) they give explanations; (3) they stay silent and ignore it; and (4) they accept the label. One niqabi respondent from Indonesia experienced being called a terrorist in public. She recalls responding as follows:

I experienced being called a terrorist, and I said this to him: "You are still alive right?" He answered: "Yes, I am. Why?" I told him: "It means I'm not a terrorist. If I am a terrorist, you would be dead (Anonim 2018).

Another respondent, Nubia from Cairo, recalled giving an explanation to the one who accused her of being a terrorist:

I accept it. I will not argue with him. But if there is a chance, I explained that not everyone who wears niqab is the same. Some wear niqab because of religious purposes,

while some do it because it's a trend. Some also wear niqab because of state obligations; they wear niqab in their country and when they go abroad for holidays, they wear bikinis. There are also those who wear niqab because of their husband's orders, and some husbands order niqab because of religion and some just are jealous of their wives and do not want their wives to be seen by other men (Nubia 2018).

A third response was related by a niqabi from Cairo, who said: "When people said that I`m terrorist, I just keep silent and pray to Allah that He give him guidance" (Lateefa 2018). A fourth response came from an Indonesian niqabi who said:

I can't blame the person who judges niqabis like that. Because if you see it, the perpetrators wear niqab, even though they may not have worn niqab originally. So I can't judge people directly…, we who wear the niqab must show it (Anonim-2 2018).

Regarding the relation between terrorism and niqabis, researchers posed the same questions to prominent figures, consisting of religious leaders, government employees, and academics. Based on focus group discussion data obtained from those figures, there appear to be two main views: one agrees that there is a correlation between the niqab and terrorism, and another believes that there is none.

A politician from Egypt argues that niqabis might be involved in terrorist acts, but she thinks it is an entry point. On Monday 22 October 2018, some Egyptian parliament members fought for the banning of the niqab at education institutions and public services (Abu 2018). One scholar from Yogyakarta asserts that there might be a correlation between niqab and terrorism. He stated:

It can also be justified [there is correlation between niqabis and terrorist] because there are facts like that. There are people whose radicalism is getting stronger towards "jihadism", then one of their religiopolitical expressions is wearing niqab (Muha 2018).

Different from the opinion of the scholar from Yogyakarta, one of the Islamic figures in Lombok, Fatah argues that there is no correlation between niqabis and terrorism. He stated not all niqabis tend to be extremist. They wear niqab solely for prevention, not based on a particular ideology" (Fatah 2018). In line with him, one Ahmadiyah figure (Nana 2018) agreed that there is no correlation between niqabis and terrorism.

4. Challenges

Both niqabis in Egypt and Indonesia face various challenges while wearing niqab. There are at least five challenges felt by niqabis, namely: (1) family treatment; (2) being considered as part of a particular group or ideology; (3) being labelled negatively; (4) narrow job opportunities; and (5) eating in public. However, there are also niqabis who have not experienced big challenges.

The first challenge shared among niqabis is her family treatment. One niqabi in Yogyakarta said: "My biggest challenge was my family. When I have to mingle with our big family, or when my family often goes out to gather with them, my mom says just stay at home" (Zia 2018). Mala, a teacher in Lampung also reported that:

The first time I wore niqab in family environment when there was a family event, I was confused, because in Lampung tradition when there were events the women would show very striking jewelry to look luxurious, but eventually I still wore the niqab at the event…. I've even

experienced someone forcing me to take off my niqab (Mala 2018).

The second challenge for niqabis is that of being considered to be members of certain groups or ideologies. Quoting Nubia, who works as physician in Egypt, "The problem that I face now is that when people see me using niqab, they assume I belong to certain groups such as salafis or Muslim brothers, or they even thought me to be a terrorist" (Nubia 2018). In line with Nubia, Indah from Indonesia also experienced the same thing. She reported: "as I already mentioned, there are people who say we [niqabis] are wahabi, salafi…" (Indah 2018).

The third challenge faced by niqabis is that they are often labelled negatively, even mocked. This is often faced by niqabis, for example: "Every time I pass by, there is surely someone talking about me. They call me a ninja, not only kids but also adults…" (Rana 2018).

The fourth challenge is the limited number of jobs that accept women who wear niqab. Safiya from Egypt said that her biggest challenge is: "narrow employment opportunities. Not all places allow me to enter and not all jobs are open for women who wear the niqab" (Safiya 2018).

The fifth challenge is eating in public restaurants. An Indonesian niqabi, Zara, a student in Lombok said: "When I am invited by friends to gather at restaurant, eating in public restaurants is difficult" (Zara 2018). The same challenge is shared by Safiya, a teacher in Cairo: "also it's difficult for me to eat in public restaurants (Safiya 2018).

However, there are also niqabis that do not really face significant challenges while wearing the niqab. Fia from Yogyakarta said: "I haven't faced any problems. Eating is also fine. Perhaps my only personal problem is if I choose a niqab with the wrong type of cloth. So I sew them myself" (Fia 2018).

Some niqabis in Egypt also felt that they do not face any big challenges. Lateefa said:

> I don't have any problem because of wearing niqab. I had many problems when I didn't wear niqab. I used to have some fun and go out with my friends. Now by wearing niqab I can manage myself to avoid that all and I feel calm. I think the biggest challenge for me is my family (Lateefa 2018).

C. Conclusion

This research reveals interesting findings. While in Egypt, the niqab has for decades been more rooted in the societal background, in the Indonesian case, the emergence of niqabis among students and professional is a recent phenomenon. So, if the majority Indonesian niqabis are university students in their first *third years*' bachelor that means that they started to wear niqab after 2015. This is in line with McLarney's argument that the Salafi movement influences women's dress by obliging them to wear niqab/cadar. Also, considering the declaration of ISIS in Indonesia in 2015, one of its teachings are that Muslim women must wear niqab.

The variety of motivations for wearing niqab leads to different responses to the challenges they face in their families, neighbourhoods, workplaces and in global politics. The motive of most niqabis, both in Egypt (93.1%) and Indonesia (66.3%), is to obey Islamic teachings. Other motivations include protection of the body, both physically and psychologically; sad experiences in the past; accommodation of other previous reasons, such as comfort, fear of death, dreams, and protection of her memorization of the Qur'an. Two-thirds of them would not take off their niqab in class or while working, even if there is instruction to do so. However, if their husbands want them to take it off, Egyptian niqabis (90%) would reject it, in contrast to the around 75% of

Indonesian niqabis who would obey their husband on the basis that obeying one's husband is compulsory (wajib) whereas wearing niqab is recommended (sunnah). Patriarchal culture is stronger among niqabis in Indonesia than among those in Egypt. This means that obedience to one's husband is more important that obeying institutions or their chiefs at work.

As for the stereotypes that relate the niqab to terrorism, these finding reveal that there are four reactions: (1) fighting back; (2) giving explanations; (3) being silent and ignoring it; and (4) accepting the label. This variation in responses might relate to the variety in niqabis' priorities, with some showing the bravery to fight back and others choosing to avoid having more problems. There are at least five challenges felt by niqabis, namely: (1) family treatment; (2) assumptions that they belong to groups or ideologies; (3) negative labels; (4) narrow job opportunities; and (5) eating in public.

In summary, it can be concluded that there are variations in niqabis' motivations to wear niqab, according to the way they negotiate their existences in an unsupportive environment, and the challenge they might face. There is no single interpretation of the existence of niqabis. The complexity of their lives has been influenced by the way they were raised, the resources (book/media) they read/received, and the state policies implemented in the places they live.

Acknowledgements

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