

Dress Practice in Islamic University: From Regulation to Consumption

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Abstract---This article discussed the dress practice of female university students of English Letters Department Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University of Jakarta, Indonesia. The primary objectives of this research were to explore how these female students defined the dress they wore and how they responded to the university regulation on the student's outfit and appearance written in the student's Code of Ethic. This was a qualitative research with a cultural approach using the technique of observation and interview. The data resulted from interview then were analyzed using the concept of circuit of culture by Stuart Hall that focused on the regulation and consumption. The study showed that dress practice of female students at campus was a kind of negotiation to deal with the university regulation. The negotiation revealed they wore the dress as they wanted and based on their preferences as long as it covered their parts of intimate body suggested by university and Islam. More than that, Instagram as one of social media by which public figure was performed had the greatest factors influencing their appearance in campus purposed for beautiful look. Religion, however, has become the underpinning behavior of the student's pity. The study could be one of the considerations for Islamic Universities or the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia when they are designing and making the regulation on how female Muslim student should dress properly based on Islamic perspective.

Keywords---*dress practice, Islamic dress, Islam identity, regulation, consumption*

1. INTRODUCTION

As cultural artifacts and practices, dress that we wear has many meanings. To gain an understanding of one artifact and cultural practice, it is important to analyze the process that occur in society, including representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation [1]. Furthermore, Barker states that representation and consumption form the level of cultural production [2]. According to Hall, culture focuses on the production and change of meaning. It is produced and will change in every social interaction [3]. In this case, the media becomes a means of production of meaning. From these viewpoints, it is obvious that dress attached to our body could indicate varieties of meaning, for instance, it is constructing and performing identity.

Drawing attention to this cultural practice, I was highly

attracted to the way the female Islamic university students dressed when attending the class. In this case, the students of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University of Jakarta (hereinafter called UIN Jakarta) have various dress choices. I observed students from the Faculty of Humanities majoring English letters where I was teaching in the academic year 207/2018. Their dress choice varied; some of them dressed modesty and covered their breast (long skirt, blouse, veil covering breast), casual dress (tight shirt and jeans, veil tailed to the neck), and recently, I found some wearing *gamis* (a kind of long dress designed for Muslim woman) and chador.

The dress practice covering the whole body and wearing hijab in an Islamic university like in UIN Jakarta was associated with the university regulations governing the dress practice and appearance written in the Student Code of Ethics [4]. This is a kind of regulation for students to wear modest Islamic clothing when they are attending the university. Particularly for female students, they must wear *Muslimah* dress with a certain type of dress such as no wearing tight dress and transparent, wearing dress that the length from wrist to the bottom is minimally 30 cm, no using tight trouser or skirt in which the length should reach the ankle. However, this regulation seemed not fully followed by the students as I saw that their dress choice did not reflect the regulation. Here, I highlight those three student's dress practice categories as it represents different meaning.

As wearing Islamic dress and hijab is the obligation for female students to perform, I assume that the way these students dressed is a kind of negotiation because their dress choice is not suiting the university regulation. Likewise, if they truly wear Islamic dress, it just because they love to do so; they wear dress as their preference and as they want without considering the regulations, either the student's Code of Ethics or the Quranic verses by which wearing such dress is suggested for every Muslim woman.

Regarding this topic, the research on fashion and hijab style in the campus area had been done by many scholars in some countries such as in Western, Middle East, and Asia. Specifically, in Indonesia there are two researches investigating these. Firstly, a study on Islam and pop culture was done by Saluz using a descriptive qualitative with observation and interview technique. She revealed the variety of practice of hijab as a popular Islamic culture in Gadjah Mada

University student in Yogyakarta. The result showed that history, government policy, mass media, economic conditions, and gender perspectives play an important role in the process of establishing popular Islamic culture in Indonesia [5].

Secondly, a research done by Warburton who compared the use of Indonesian women's hijab during the Soeharto and post-Suharto years. During the Soeharto era, prejudices to women with veils, even the institution strictly prohibited the use of hijab. In Post-Soeharto, women felt more freedom to wear hijab, and the institutions accommodated and encouraged the use of hijab in public spaces. Warburton chose the Islamic University of Indonesia Yogyakarta as an example of regimental change by making female students who wear hijab as the object of her research. The results show that institutions played an important role in shaping Muslim identity, and hijab was a form of good Muslim women [6].

The two studies above are illuminating the use of hijab, meanwhile this study focused on the student's dress practice in contemporary era by which wearing hijab is obligated in Islamic university. To give a deeper understanding of this cultural practice, circuit of culture which consisted of representation, production, regulation and consumption is seemingly important to undertake. Here, circuit of culture has an important role in interpreting and defining the dress that students wear. Thus, this research aims to explore how do the students define the dress they use when attending Islamic university and to explore how do they response to the university regulation. To reveal these two questions, the circuit culture is limited to two concepts only; regulation and consumption.

II. METHOD

This was a qualitative research with a cultural study approach using the technique of observation and interview. The female students majoring English Letters of UIN Jakarta, Indonesia become the main concern for this research. It involved two classes from the second semester class D, and fourth semester class D. These two classes were chosen as I taught them during the academic year of 2017/2018. After taking an observation during one semester, there were three categories of students' fashion choice: first, modest dress that covered their breast (long skirt, blouse, veil covering breast), second, casual dress (tight shirt and jeans, veil tailed to the neck), the last, the *gamis* (a kind of long dress designed for Muslim woman) and chador. The interview was conducted by choosing five students who fulfilled the three categories mentioned above. The data resulted from interview then were analyzed by using the concept of circuit of culture by Stuart Hall which focused only on the regulation and consumption. This concept was used to explore how the female students define the dress that they wore when they attended the university, then how responded to the university regulation.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Generally, wearing hijab was a choice for Muslim in Indonesia, although the suggestion is clearly written in the Quran (QS: Al-Ahzab, 59; and QS: An-Nuur, 31) [7]. Hasan

and Harun, explained that, Indonesian society is predominantly Muslim, but hijab is not a religious norm [8]. According to them, the practice of hijab in Indonesia has a variety of meanings such as style, simplicity, and resolve. This is quite different from those who want to study in Islamic university in Indonesia, UIN Jakarta, the female students must wear Islamic dress (covering their whole body unless face and palm and wearing hijab). The campus environment becomes a multicultural context, as the students come from different background and communicate each other on a daily basis. As they have a different background, they also have a different dress practice [9]. Then, the Islamic university where they are studying has a role in shaping their identity as an Islamic university's students.

The first category of student's dress choice: modest dresses that cover their breast (long skirt, blouse, veil covering breast) were obtained Zenith Azkiyatis Suud and Iin Dwi Jayanti. Zenith said that wearing a modest dress was her obligation as a Muslim woman. She loved to use a simple dress, loose, and sometimes it should be matching. Zenith admitted that before entering the campus, she learned at the *Pesantren* and it influenced the way she dressed until now. Moreover, her family kept telling her not to wear a tight dress in her daily activity. She realized that as a Muslim, she had to cover their whole body (unless face and palms) and wearing hijab. She should keep her style as her style is rarely found in English Department. Thus, Zenith tried to define the dress she wears as an obligation mandated by Allah that she must wear an Islamic dress. Then, she wanted to say that her style was the most appropriate dress practice in her campus as she saw the university regulation. Her style suited the university regulation. Next student, Iin who loved this dress choice as it reflected the identity of Muslim woman that should dress modestly. The way Iin dressed was influenced by many factors such as educational background, family, TV programs, commercial TV's advertisements, and online shopping. In the one side, Zenith and Iin tried to be a good Muslim by practicing such dress when attending the university. On the other side, they wanted to say that it was the most appropriate outfit for them, either as an Islamic university student or as a Muslim woman.

Next, the second category (casual dress) was the prevalent dress practice in English letters Department. The students named Sabila Sajidah said that the way she wore a dress to the campus was based on her wish. She didn't consider it as an obligation for her as a Muslim, or as a regulation that she should follow. She just dressed as she wanted and based on her preferences. Then, what did actually she define the dress she wore when attending university? Sabila said that the way she dresses was truly because she loved it and made her comfort. Her dress style is influenced by her friends in Campus and the public figure who always wore Muslim Fashion such as Claudia Cintya Bella. She adored this artist fashion style just because she looked beautiful. In Sajidah's mind, it would be really good when she dressed like this artist and looked more beautiful and Islamic. The other student, Permata Annisa has the same opinion. For her, it was important to look attractive and beautiful with the dress she wore, and Instagram for her has a significant influence on her dress practice. What Sajidah

and Permata said indicates that the use of Islamic dress today was not because they wanted to show her religious identity, but to say it was beautiful when they wore hijab like the artist. Lateh and Mudor said that at the present time, wearing a Hijab is applied for a beautiful and creative look, but it is still used for the purpose of covering parts of female's body [10]. In the one hand, wearing Islamic dress and hijab is related to religion. On the other hand, it used for beautiful appearance. For Sajidah and Permata case, Media by which an artist performed has a significant influence on her dress choice. This media provided strong persuasion that woman in that dress and hijab looked more beautiful. As a result, these two students felt more confidence with the dress they wore as it represented the beauty.

Here, I can say that wearing Islamic dress and hijab is not merely about the regulation either the student's Code of Ethics or the Quranic verses but how the users' imagination and desire to look beautiful constructed by media and had been internalized in the mind of its viewers, like Sajidah and Permata. Basically, religion provides a rule and has certain cultural values for people to behave appropriately [11]. Moreover, religion influences behavior and encourages religious expression. This can be seen clearly when Sajidah said that she used the dress as she wishes without considering the regulation. Wearing Islamic dress and hijab is a kind of religious expression but then the media is also participated in this religious expression. Furthermore, this leads to consumption; the user is invited to keep buying the dress they want that can present the beauty in herself. Islamic dress including hijab has transformed into commodity. The use of hijab as an indication of one's obedience has been commoditized and turned into an object of consumption [12].

Turning to the third category, Ridha Wahyu Diani usually called Ayu. She was the only student in English letters Department from class C, who wore a chador and had a different opinion on the dress and hijab. She wore a chador since she was in *pesantren* that obligated her to do so and also the influence of her five family members who wore it. Ayu started fully wearing a chador when she was in the second semester in the university. Previously, her chador was temporary opened and closed. Ayu said that when started entering the second semester of her college, she decided to wear a chador permanently. The reason was that she wanted to keep her body from the eyes of non *mehram* men (relatives) and to keep herself from doing bad things and stop sinning. She admitted that when she wore a chador, it prevented her from sinning. For instance, when she was gathering with her friends and they started gossiping, she suddenly withdrew from the discussion. For student like Ayu, her dress practice was inseparable with her religiosity. She wanted to keep herself with Allah, be closer to Him, and avoiding forbidden things. Here, the dressed she wore served as underpinning behavior on her religiosity. More than that, the dress practice and religious ties to the Islamic faith became inseparable. Furthermore, *Pesantren* where Ayu studied during her school year had a great influence on her dress practice as the Islamic teaching was predominantly embraced her into deep religiosity. Further, Ayu revealed that the way she wore a chador also influenced

the way she chose the dress choice. She kept looking trendy although with a chador. She admitted media gave her influence on her dress choice.

From these three students' interview, it is obvious that student's religiosity is the biggest factor influencing their dress choice when attending the university. *Pesantren*, however has a profound effect on the students dress practice in English Letters Department of UIN Jakarta. The students who wear the first category and the last category have a strong relation with Islamic teaching when they were studying in *Pesantren*. For the second category, they tend to use Islamic dress as they want without considering the Islamic suggestion to cover their whole of body and wearing Hijab. For this second category, a social media particularly Instagram has a significant role in shaping their view on the beauty attach to Islamic dress.

As reflected in the dress practice, the students tend to use the dress based on their preferences. Here, the students try to negotiate with the university regulation. They keep using Islamic dress but wear the dress as they want and preferences. The three categories of student's dress practice indicate that this cultural practiced have been changed from the essential function of dress as they are entering new environment, Islamic university. They tend to follow the trend fashion happening in the present time as the effect of media which spreading and persuading the ideal beauty for Muslim woman by using a kind of Islamic dress. As a result, the students strive to modify their style in fashion to suit the Islamic university. They keep using dress that covering their whole body and wearing hijab; combining their religious identity; becoming Islamic but trendy even though it less modest.

IV. CONCLUSION

Dress practice in Islamic university points out two significant identifications; religious identity and the beauty. Both of them are seemingly important to be performed in campus area as the influence of Instagram; the strongest social media by which the beauty of the dress practice users are displayed and it represents the beauty of the users.

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