

Conservative in Belief, Modern in Lifestyle: Fashion Blogging as a New Habitus for Hybrid Identities

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a visual analysis of three highly-followed conservative women's fashion blogs in Turkey. The study asks how conservative female fashion bloggers construct their identities via visual media representations and negotiate their identities within celebrity culture in an age of extreme self-display. Based on visual discourse analysis, it examines fashion blogging as a case study of an online community centred around the use and display of fashion styles via visual representation of subjectivities. It performs critical visual analysis of selected popular fashion blogs in Turkey with respect to the questions of *self-branding*, *publicity*, and *conservatism*. The aim is to see how these bloggers negotiate their online identities in platforms like blogger.com and Instagram through visual materials, analysing the ways they construct their identities via Islamic fashion, through the framework of fame and visibility notions.

Keywords: Fashion Blogging, Identity Construction, Mobility, Visibility, Visual Analysis

1. Introduction



Elif and her sister pose in front of their motorcycle, Şüheda rides an ATV in the outskirts of the city, while Zehra gives a ride to her baby in a park. These three women live in the metropolitan

city of Istanbul and are among the top conservative fashion bloggers in Turkey. These images - shared in their fashion blogs- promote a sense of mobility: we see each woman spending her leisure time enjoying outdoor activities.

Elif and her sister, being the prominent subjects of the photograph, pose with their motorcycles that are evidences of their mobile and modern characters with increased importance through the lower angle shot. The high-rise buildings under construction in the background give the sense of their imminent presence as newly emerging urbanites who claim belonging to the new city of Istanbul constantly under renovation and construction. Şüheda has a determined and focused orientation while driving an ATV in the outskirts of the city. This picture and other photos of her riding a horse, feeding lambs and chickens in a farm in her Instagram page, give the idea of her enjoying and escape from the exhausting city life. Zehra does many of her activities with her newly born son and her motherhood is stressed in the picture. Carrying her son at the back of her bicycle in a park in Bursa, she defines herself as a mobile and adventurous mother in her pictures.

In their narratives, Şüheda, Elif and Zehra all fulfill the tech-savvy, mobile, out-going and free modern-day Turkish woman image. They share any activity they are doing related to contemporary urban life, such as doing outdoor sports, chilling in festivals, dwelling in the city or going abroad. We see independent and successful women, who know how to be fashionable, fancy and enjoy life. They incorporate their daily routines and their private lives to their own fashion styles and clothing combinations in the photos. But in what ways do they construct their conservative identities in online platforms and how does each in her own way become a visible and popular fashion blogger? Who are these women and how do they differ from each other in terms of their mobility?

In light of these questions, fashion blogs written by these three women are analysed as case studies to shed light on the ways conservative fashion bloggers express themselves visually. The fashion blogosphere is chosen for the study as it represents the tastes of the conservative Turkish women, their own definitions of Islam and relationship with veiling fashion. “Conservative” here refers to female Muslim bloggers, who practice their religion according to Islamic rules and codes and wear headscarf or veil. Differentiating from “religious vs. secular cleavage” discussions, the concept of “conservatism” is preferred as it implies a restrained style, favouring Islamic views and values, being a productive term to define women who are bound by Islamic principles and specifically veiled. Concurrently, with its fluid and contested nature this is an operational definition as being conservative is shaped relationally and through material practices within the everyday. Although the study encompasses the bloggers with an Islamic lifestyle and ethical understanding, they differ in their self-reflections in online environments but usually preserve their conservative identities. Thus, apart from symbolic and ideological distinctions terms like “Islamic, traditional, Muslim” convey, “conservative”, as an operational term, is used to define and distinguish veiled bloggers among all other bloggers.

The scarcity of analysis on women’s fashion blogging within non-Western settings makes this research an important contribution that examines the narratives and disclosure practices of Muslim female bloggers as they navigate a conservative domestic sphere and a mediatized global visual culture. As in the first picture above, Elif takes off her helmet and her headscarf is visible, while her sister has her helmet on. Modernity may seem incompatible with veiling given the association

of veiling with traditionalism while fashion is identified with modernity (Gökarıksel and Secor, 2009). However, with an increasing diversity of brands and ever-changing styles, veiling-fashion has been on the rise in Turkey and the fact that Elif takes off her helmet and shows her headscarf, highlights the modern Muslim woman image, stressing the union of Islam with modernity. Here, “modern” refers to successful/entrepreneur/ambitious/mobile spirit used against passive/immobile/housewife image and borrowed from Zygmunt Bauman (2000)’s “late modernity” definition, corresponding with global, capitalist modernity. Making these women the representatives of information revolution, being blogger is also closely related with this late modernity concept. Given the existing prejudices about relating “Islamic with the traditional” and Turkey’s integration into the neoliberal economic system through a conservative framework, conservative fashion blogosphere constitutes a good starting point to investigate the complicated articulation of modern Muslim woman image in Turkey.

In these blogs, collective identity left itself to individualized selves where Islamic apprehension is privatized. Exploring representations of one’s self in online platforms provides us a deeper understanding of the embodiment practices, objects and places used for incorporation to the mainstream culture. Therefore, focusing on the narratives of three women and how they construct their subjectivities based on their visual choices in online platforms, the study argues that modern, mobile and trendy Muslim women identities are carefully-curated, visually-staged and constructed online for public consumption to challenge the existing stereotypes of Muslim women as immobile, unchanging and unmodern. The visual choices of three bloggers demonstrated their different ways of constructing their identities and publicizing their subjectivities. Creating their own fashion styles, also their own definitions of Islam, the three bloggers discursively constructed their conservative identities upon which they also formed their blog narratives. This study revealed three paths to conservative women’s mobility that are upward, social and urban mobility.

Thus, this research uses an interpretive, critical approach to examine fashion blogging as a case study of an online community centred on the use and display of fashion styles via visual representation of subjectivities.

Planned as a complementary study for the previous research (Sim 2017) based on the textual content analysis of the conservative fashion blogosphere in Turkey, this research develops on evaluating the visuals posted by the conservative fashion bloggers in online social networking platforms. Looking at the cultural significance of the visuals, data collection is based mainly on visual discourse analysis. Also, to gain a close and intimate familiarity with the bloggers and their cultural and social environment, semi-structured interviews are conducted in blogger events or through e-mail exchanges. All of the three bloggers are well-educated, intelligent people who exhibit a certain level of cultural capital that they could channel into their pursuits and aspirations.

The dataset analysed is the visuals posted between the years 2013–2016 to the blogs and Instagram pages of the three bloggers, whom are chosen from the 27 blogs previously researched based on two criteria: they had digital/social media production in the feminized fields of fashion, style or retail; and they were among the most popular conservative fashion bloggers. Among the three bloggers, Şüheda (28) started with her amateur blog and then has become one of the most popular veiling fashion designers establishing her own brands and transforming her blog to

websites where she also sells her own products. As of November 12, 2018, she has 98,000 Instagram followers. The other two bloggers also turned their blogs into websites, Elif (29), having 104,000 Instagram followers (November 12, 2018), cooperates with veiling fashion industry and acts as a style advisor and model also continues to share her own styles and daily life. Having 637 blog followers (November 12, 2018), Zehra (30) still continues blogging in her first blog template and has recently closed her Instagram account due to her limited time. Permission is taken for the usage of their photos and interview data for research purposes.

This article first reviews the literature on new media and blogging as a general concept. Secondly, it concentrates on fashion blogging and the use of visuals within fashion blogging. Focusing on the blogger as the subject, the third section explains the relationships between “being seen” and articulating an online fashionable identity in relation to the construction of a modern conservative woman image in Turkey. It also examines how these bloggers negotiate with fame and celebrity culture discussing issues such as private life, self-branding and publicity. Finally, concluding remarks are presented.

1.1 New Media and Blog Culture

New media, based on computer usage and interaction, made user-generated content available along with the rise of social media websites. The infrastructure of Web 2.0 has enabled Internet users to interact and collaborate with each other, allowing social media to become one of the most powerful tools with a major impact on our communication styles, socialization and self-formation processes. Henry Jenkins (2006) have emphasized the co-creativity aspects of social media where fans are empowered by being involved in cultural production¹. Social media platforms have materially broadened the access and ease of production, inviting users to co-create content and value (Jenkins 2006; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Interfaces such as blogs, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter have become powerful social media tools that highly dominate our leisure time. Serving as a platform where “self” is made and remade, online platforms stand as a medium for women to wriggle out their gender roles and at times negotiate patriarchal hegemony. Specifically, blogs appear as a reflexive medium for women to interact and communicate with each other, and also provide the digital spaces through which they reflect on their status in the society (Zareie 2013). Providing an utmost interactivity for fame and attention, blogging can give one the chance to communicate his/her favourite social identity to a large audience and quickly become a “celebrity”, leading to the emergence of what Alice E. Marwick (2013a) calls the “micro-celebrities”.

Multimedia content gains popularity along with the rise of applications like Instagram, Snapchat and Vimeo. The blogosphere has become a promising site which offers to combine storytelling with multimedia content, including from lifestyles, daily lives, literature, technology, politics, fashion, health, hobbies & crafts to commercial products. The blogosphere serves as a platform where “self” is represented through various channels, reshaping the borders of the public

¹ Jenkins was criticized for his tendency to overstate the creativity of users and neglect processes of exploitation and alienation since users’ time and energies have been utilized as an unpaid form of work (Fuchs 2014; Andrejevic 2011). However, this pleasure vs. exploitation discourse is not the particular focus of this study.

sphere. Blogger meetings and events have become popular among female bloggers in Turkey. Drawing on face-to-face interviews with bloggers, it is seen that participation in a blogger event is “fancy”, “cool” and “desirable” and if you are not invited, the implication is that you are not a good blogger. As a social activity, blogging thus provides scope for an enormous variety of expressions within a simple, restricted format. Sarah Banet Weiser (2011) draws attention to “self-disclosure” in the context of a post-feminist era wherein young women are encouraged to use social media to brand themselves. By foregrounding their creative aspirations above all, bloggers are able to reconcile internal motivations with expected demands of audiences and advertisers. Pooley (2010:72, 83) explains a concept of calculated authenticity, which is manifest in “carefully-curated-identities” and the strategic performance of the self as brand.

Although blogs are effective in many respects and there is a remarkable blogger power in the marketing area, one can only accept the fast growth in the usage of Instagram application. Instagram is one of the most preferred and used applications among fashion bloggers given its ease and quickness to share styles and combinations of clothing. Given the fast-track lives we live in, it is easier to lose less time in reading or writing. Posting a picture rather than writing a whole piece of a blog post or seeing a picture rather than reading a long piece of writing is easier. It is quickly consumed by the audience who has always less time and is in a hurry. No time to read but there is always time to look. Mirzoeff (1998) explains this as “sensual immediacy of picture”. Instagram users appear as sophisticated and tech-savvy people who do not only take photographs but also know to design (Manovich 2016) as fashion bloggers spend so much time for articulation and setting of their photos.

In order to clarify and interpret how the conservative fashion bloggers use and design images in their blogs, it is necessary to build upon theoretical lenses that pivots on visibility, gaze and fame notions. Given the close connection between seeing and being seen, Andrea Brighenti suggests, “visibility breeds identification and makes it possible” (2007: 325), but also Gillian Rose states, “what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed” (2001: 6). For a model to exist, it has to be before everybody’s eyes and tends to be defined in moral terms as it inspires behaviour and attitude (Brighenti 2007: 334). Being a celebrity brings the idea of being a model to be followed and this fame and attention needs to be reproduced, while the image needs to be looked at and desired. Roland Barthes points out that “the image is created to invite the gaze of the individual and the collective. It is interdiscursive and relies on the spectator to become fully realized” (cited in Fuery and Fuery 2003:101). Are we still talking about a unified collective gaze, or rather is it more important for one to fulfill her/his own desire to be seen?

Adam Arvidsson’s research points to “‘socially recognized self-realization’ as participants’ primary motivation for online social production” in which people collaborate, both for achieving pleasure and also peer recognition (2008:332). Mark Deuze (2007:77) suggests, “People seem to be increasingly willing to participate voluntarily in the media making process to achieve what can be called a networked reputation”. This is also closely related to what Marwick calls as “micro-celebrities”- a term used to address being famous within a niche group, either via self-promotion or through the recognition of others (2013a). She describes “micro-celebrity” as a fan-based self-presentation technique adopted within social media to gain publicity and attention. Dressing up for

their audience, on a personal level, achieving self-realization and publicity becomes one of the main concerns of fashion bloggers' online social production.

1.2 Fashion Blogging

In the ongoing debates between Western and non-Western scholars about the role of social media in women's lives in patriarchal societies, it is widely expected that "social media could be an empowering tool for women, enhancing their participation in several facets of their lives, including the legal, economic, political and social aspects" (Arab Social Media Report 2011:9). Given the important role of social media and blogging during the Arab Spring, women's involvement in public sphere as activists has been realized via the affordances of digital media (Radsch and Khamis 2013). While claims regarding historical ruptures stemming from technology might be misleading, the traditional portrayal of Middle Eastern women also started to partly change thanks to the opportunities of digital media and specifically blogging.

Fashion blogs are subsets of blogs that cover the fashion industry, clothing, and personal style. Parallel to the rise of weblogs and the effect of new media, fashion blogging has grown increasingly. As of July 2010, slightly more than 2 million bloggers were classified as being "with an industry of fashion" (Rocamora 2011:409). Given the rising female participation in fashion blogging scene, it is necessary to investigate the representation of "self" in fashion blogs where a wide variety of images shared to form a cultural narrative. Scholars have examined fashion blogging from a variety of perspectives, including female identity construction processes in fashion blogging (Chittenden 2010), self-disclosure in social media for self-branding (Banet-Weiser 2011), fashion blogging as a form of self-actualization where cultural labour turns into a capitalist business practice (Marwick 2013b). Fashion bloggers construct a "fashionable persona" via displaying their daily lives as well as their tastes and feelings in pictures and texts, by "enacting a situated narrative, and performative subject position constructed in contention with the dissimulating possibilities of fashion" (Titton 2015:218). Ángeles M. Garcia and Marina R. Serrano (2016) positions the bloggers as in a halfway between a celebrity and an opinion leader, and state: "social media networks like Instagram have allowed anonymous people become true leaders of opinion, whom at the same time are influenced by the fashion industry" (2016: 106). What these works lack is the insider's look about the ways bloggers become "influencers", "trendsetters" and define being a blogger as their lifetime careers.

Fashion itself is a visual act and representing one's social position and identity online as "fashionable" highly depends on images rather than words. Being modern and popular, keeping up with technology and new trends are important aspects of being fashionable. As being celebrities setting the trends, fashion bloggers need to preserve this look since the gaze of the others is upon them. Fashion bloggers also see themselves from the eyes of the others with a certain will to be looked at, followed and desired which also reminds us Lacan's notion of scopic gaze of the big other (McGowan 2007). This also gives bloggers the opportunity to become more visible providing an utmost interactivity for fame and attention. Thus, the study asks how these women construct their modern identities in online platforms while keeping their conservativeness.

1.3 Visual Narratives of Conservative Fashion Bloggers

Being visible is closely related to the varying perceptions of different dressings. Fashion itself stands as a way of self-expression and according to the dressing styles- although it is a slippery definition- one can define others in terms of class, gender, age, lifestyle and even religion. Appearance emerges as a way to express one's self. Expansion of religious life style in the popular consumption culture within the context of neoliberal economic restructuring and conservatism Turkey has experienced, also changes the traditional understanding of Muslim dressing.

Given the rise of veiling fashion industry locally and globally, Islamic fashion has become topic of interest for various sorts of disciplines from fashion studies to sociology and anthropology. Focusing on Britain, North America, and Turkey, Reina Lewis (2015) examines Muslim fashion opposing the suggestion that being a Muslim is incompatible with Western modernity and analyses the ways young Muslim women negotiate their cultural identity using fashion. Gabriel and Hannan (2011) target the ill-informed thoughts upon veiling as a symbol of cultural backwardness in West and propose new ways of looking at the issue, including more empathy, less subjectivity and careful examination of the motivations of veiled Muslim women. Based on Qur'an, the meaning behind veiling has also been explored by Elif Deniz, who reported that "this bodily practice is not only affected by religious orders but started to be managed under a variety of pressures coming from the modern life circumstances, especially the rising veiling fashion phenomenon in the last decades" (2014: 247). Veiling and covered dress have often been discussed in instrumentalist terms, as women cover "for acquiring freedom and movement" or "as a form of identity politics" (Tarlo and Moors 2013:5). By veiling, the body of the woman is produced as a site of religious stratification as well as cultivating the distinctions between piety and class (Gökarıksel and Secor 2012). Post-colonial scholar Saba Mahmood (2005) underlines the necessity to look from the perspectives of women who are covered and underlines that there is a religious motivation behind this covering.

The relationship between veiling and the fashion industry in Turkey has deepened although veil is regarded as traditional while fashion is identified with modernity and they may seem incompatible with each other (Gökarıksel and Secor 2009). "Veiling is undertaken in relation to the moral code of Islam, but fashion, as consumption works as part of an ever-shifting economy of taste and distinction" (Gökarıksel and Secor 2012: 847). Differentiating between the headscarf and veil, Göle (1996) argues that headscarf remains in traditional sphere being inherited from generation to generation, while veil is possessed as a modern symbol of transformation from traditional spheres to modern spheres. According to Deniz, "from 1980's to 2000's, the practice of veiling has constantly gained new meanings because of Islamist social and political mobilization, engagement with global market economy, fusion of neoliberalism and Islamism" (2014:242). Under Justice and Development Party (AKP) rule, veiling-fashion continues to develop, and the contemporary modern, urban character of Islamic dress is different than the traditional veiling that are also at times in dispute. The new Muslim woman is defined as, "fashionable, increasingly savvy about creating her own style, who wants to catch the eye, and who is often able and willing to pay the price has entered into the public imagination" (Gökarıksel and Secor 2009: 14). Constructing new ideas about femininity, taste, social status and distinction

(Saktanber 2002; Secor 2002), “the new veiling represents the public and collective affirmation of women who are searching for recognition of their Muslim identity through its expression-that is, through Islamism” (Göle 1996: 23). Göle’s description is useful however remains to be a bit dated given the “moderate-Islamic” AKP rule Turkey has experienced for 16 years. In an open economy regime, adapting to the economic circumstances, the new Muslim bourgeoisie appears with a new habitus as the veiling fashion industry grows with their clothing and consumer life styles reflecting these women’s social positions in terms of class. Thus, Muslim women are no more in search for recognition of their identities but as the narratives of the three bloggers demonstrate, they socially construct their identities online, also attracting other women to follow them.

Fashion blogs usually emerge as an advice-giving tool or a brand-making platform. Conservative bloggers, as supporters or members of veiling fashion industry in Turkey, can show their own works, exchange their views with their audience and gain publicity via their blogging activities. Constantly interacting and collaborating with each other, they unite and form informal groupings, turn their hobbies into job opportunities and finally start promoting their own or other brands in their blogs or websites. They experience their own personal tastes and opinions not only via self-reflexive and self-referential texts but also through images. With different kinds of techniques, magazine type photos are taken as fashion models. “Through this combination, fashion bloggers simultaneously refer to their self-identity, to their own corporeality as well as to collective representations of fashion, femininity, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and modernity” (Titton 2015: 214).

The construction of a modern conservative woman image involves a range of bodily practices. Dressing and fashion styles are usually accompanied by consumption and life styles as they also play important roles for individual and collective expression of identities. Hence, fashion cannot be thought separately from body and body politics. Specifically, in fashion blogging, body is socially constructed as being the central object of images embodying different and multiple meanings. Images do not only revolve around the outfit but also knowing how to pose is a crucial aspect of being a fashion blogger. Different forms of embodiment emerge in fashion discourse given its expectations from its practitioners to be elegant, fashionable, trendy, joyful and eye catching. It is also likely to incur some tension between the body and the image upon these collective representations of affects.

Thus, aiming to unite Göle’s (1996) argument on the visibility of Muslim identity through veiling with Lacan’s (1978) “scopic gaze” notion that corresponds to desire, the desire for self-completion through the other, this study concentrates on conservative fashion blogosphere where the spectator watches the blogger and the blogger behaves accordingly knowing that she is being watched. So, she constructs her online identity through the desire to complement herself with the presence of the audience which in turn feeds her with feedbacks, likes and comments so that she could exist.

Drawing on this framework, following narratives show how three bloggers discursively constructed their hybrid identities that are modern, fashionable, mobile and also conservative.

1.4 From Blogger to Designer: A Conservative Businesswoman

Şüheda's blog Susutown.com has started in 2011 with an amateur spirit and she moved to professionals' league after she was awarded by the then Prime Minister Erdoğan with the Young Entrepreneurship Award. From her posts both textually and visually, it is understood that this award became a turning point for her career as a designer. Despite the fact that she started her blog in Blogger.com (susutown.blogspot.com), she does not accept herself as a blogger and says, "I am a designer and I use my blog and website for my designs". In our correspondences she insists that she is a fashion designer not a blogger; a professional businesswoman not an amateur. She occasionally gives lectures and educates young potential veiling fashion designers in a fashion school. Doing her masters in cultural studies in a reputable university in Istanbul, she is also the President of Board of Directors of TATEG (Tasarımcı ve Tekstil Girişimcileri Derneği). Her own YouTube channel is also about to start.

Şüheda's self-representation in her photographs is a humble one. She does hardly any make-up and has a modest way of clothing style. She generally prefers to share pictures of her own designs for commercial purposes. She sometimes models for her own products. Despite the fact that she posts her self-portraits as well as photos with her friends or other bloggers, they all remain related to her working environment. She does not want to reveal her private life, it is even part of the blog to the extent that it relates to her work².

Compared to other bloggers, she has a closer standing to the government. She posts many visuals about her success praised by the then Prime Minister Erdoğan, including the 2012 economy prize. Her conservative identity is constructed upon her success as a young, enterprising businesswoman in the pictures. Her Instagram account contains a blend of photographs of her taken in certain places including business meetings, lecturing in a fashion school, an exhibition, opening ceremony of her own company branch, a foundation's dinner and backstage of her show. In her photos, she is giving lectures or attending conferences posing for the camera with a direct look.



Picture 1

² The study is conducted between the years 2013-2016. Şüheda opens her private life to the public in a more intimate manner via her recently established YouTube channel.

Carrying her baby in her arms, she poses in front of a wall with a quote: “Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.” (Picture 1). The photo is taken carefully to make us see the baby and the quote on the wall in the same frame, giving the message: despite being a mother, she also can have a successful career.



Picture 2

In Picture 2, a meeting scene is photographed in front of a world image which symbolizes Şüheda and her team’s incorporation to the global market system. The angle of the photo provides a wider perspective so that all the team members and Şüheda could be seen at the forefront while the world stays behind them. Her self-confidence with the direct look at the camera coincides with her success story and her businesswoman image. Her photos are not close-ups but rather taken by professionals from different angles, while she is usually up to or doing something related to her work, such as dressing models, signing contracts or designing a dress.

Şüheda draws, designs and sells. She also prepares her models for the fashion shows. She emphasizes that success has something to do with being present in every aspect of business. As a successful designer who has good ties with the government, she is praised and rewarded. She seems to have separated her private life from her public life which is mainly centred on her work.

In the few pictures she shares about her private life, she is seen with her family in a wedding, swimming with her son, her friends visiting her company and she is visiting her friend’s new shop. The private life photos she shared are shot in front of certain backgrounds including the brand name of her own company, Şüşütown, or the products in her friend’s shop, reminding that her businesswoman character traits are always there. She uses her website to promote her own brand and her products and her private life photos are used as complementary acts of her businesswoman image.

Her conservative identity reveals itself in her baby’s photos, since the baby’s face is covered with certain symbols or covers (Picture 1) until he turns to one-year-old, to protect him from “nazar”. This is a conservative myth of believing in the evil eye and feelings of jealousy could prosper with the gaze of the others and the baby could be affected negatively. She also openly represents her conservativeness in her photos containing mosque visits or various forms of prayers in Arabic forms of writings.



Picture 3

In Picture 3, we see her pose next to an “Allah”(God) sign in a wall of Ulu Camii, a mosque in Edirne. From the distant angle the photo is taken, her bodily presence remains very small compared to the huge Allah sign. Her message is dwelled around the wall size sign that her body is not that important but the mosque itself. Despite the overload of business-related pictures, especially her haute-couture designs, some pictures reflect her conservative identity as well. One crowded mosque picture from Medina is also accompanied by a pray in her Instagram feed and got tremendous support from her fans. Another picture she shares consists a handwritten pray on top of the clothes she is designing on a desk in her atelier. This situation is closely related to the holiness of her work place and the job she does. Given the widespread belief in Islam, when people have taken a decision and do as much as they can for this end, they also put their trust in Allah to achieve their goals. There are means of earning a living, both physical and spiritual and as well as making an effort, searching, striving and not giving up, praying to Allah is also an essential part.

Şüheda takes her power from the success she achieved in six years as a young professional in veiling fashion industry. The ways she uses to define herself in her blog and social networking sites both orally and visually started to change after gaining a full reputation. Leaving her amateur soul behind, she has moved to a more professional level which also brings a responsibility of preserving her public image in front of the gaze of the others. She is more visible and self-confident with the idea that she earned this success. She justifies this situation in a comment she replied in her Instagram feed, “I did not come here with my father’s money. I built it on my own!” In face-to-face conversation she explains that she actually meant she started everything without a capital. Thus, in both situations she underlines her own entrepreneurial character, and stresses that her success has nothing to do with a certain class although she had a finance major from a private university which has a high tuition waiver that still is a sign of upper-middle-class identity. Focusing on her career and designs, she establishes a direct communication with the audience. She uses her fame to support her career and brand by showing up in exhibitions, conferences, social or state-level events and university lectures.

She is visible by her success, brand and company and her online identity -complemented by her religious image- grows on this. She achieved her current status through hard-working, turning her blog from hobby to pro, her occupation from a student to a successful and famous

businesswoman. Her move involves a change in her social class upward and her choices of visuals represent an upward mobility.

1.5 A Cool Conservative Mother

Being a sociologist, Zehra started her blog Zehranesoyler.com (What does Zehra tell?) in 2011 and still continues with it. Her previous jobs include working in a publishing house and a veiling fashion company. She established her own brand “Z’den Concept” but ended it since it did not meet her expectations. She admitted in her interview that she is not able to post much fashion content recently but focused more on mothering. It is obvious from her late pictures that she constructs her identity on motherhood than her fashionable persona. Her son, whom she calls as Baladam (honeymen) rather than using his own name, is as famous as her among her audience.

Zehra started her Instagram page after her son’s birth with the intention to share her happiness and love. Contrary to Şüheda, she shows her love to her husband publicly and shares her family pictures without any hesitations. Established as a personal fashion blog, her blog appears more as a diary, focusing on the daily mother and son clothing combinations. Although, personal fashion blogs are primarily based on personal experiences on style and fashion, when women become mothers, their attitudes switch towards motherly issues and blogs may be neglected as motherhood comes with extra domestic labour. As a social construction, motherhood is seen as something to be proud of and worth mentioning.

Zehra’s daily life mainly revolves around her son. At one point, she gives an excuse to her audience why she neglected her blog lately: “Sorry for not being here for a long time, but you know, I am a mother now.” She says that she now thinks about the clothes both she and her son wears, and tries to match each other. She does not have any professional photographer but her husband. She generally looks at her son during the photo-shoots or they altogether look at the camera as a family. This may give us the feeling that she is a caring mother and a wife. She points out that, “Although I had started my blog as a styling advisor, in time, my followers and I had an intimate connection and I invited them into my own private life”. Thus, she does not have a clear-cut distinction between her online identity and her private self, but a mutual relationship between the two.

Before her son was born, Zehra was closing her face with certain symbols in her previous photos. Rather than Şüheda’s evil eye concern, this attitude shows another concern related to being public. She had a more conservative perspective back then or she was focusing on the clothing but not her private life before. Thus, comparing her previous posts with the recent ones, it is true to say that the baby’s birth is the turning point in Zehra’s narrative, which led her to construct her conservative identity in a different and more open manner.



Picture 4

In Picture 4, Zehra is seen making a selfie with her son accompanying her in a shopping centre. The photo is taken from the mirror, so that both Zehra and her son could be seen. The photograph reflects how she is proud of her son and herself and the red purse she holds and the clothes in the background give the idea of a fashionable mother. As an indispensable part of modern urban culture, being in a shopping centre (the picture is taken in the most luxurious one in Istanbul) is one of the most common photo shooting places of Zehra. The next photo in Picture 4, was also shot in front of a fancy restaurant with a sea-view at Bosphorus area which favours a “bourgeois” taste and identity given the expensive restaurant at the back. The setting and background of the image may also suggest an ideal location for a family breakfast experience, simultaneously boosting visibility and brand awareness of the restaurant. Second part of the picture highlights Zehra’s motherhood consisting of her looking at her son with a motherly appreciation and compassion.

If her post is about motherhood or pregnancy, she openly shares private information in her pictures. The sacredness of being a mother let her define herself more publicly, without any concern of hiding herself. Additionally, given that Turkey is going under neoliberal changes through a conservative framework, marriage and family life, especially motherhood is being promoted by both the state and society³. Thus, this sometimes results in the neglect of the blog’s fashion content and Zehra starts talking about her experiences as a mother. Likewise, she shares her own and her baby’s clothing styles as well. Sometimes the baby’s shoes or stroller, sometimes Zehra’s bag or headscarf can be the spectator’s concern.

With the birth of her son, Zehra experienced a social mobility. Her social class has not changed but her occupation since she gave up her job and stayed at home as a full-time mother. As a social construction, motherhood is seen as something to be proud of and worth mentioning. She constructs her online identity through her motherhood, family ties and intimacy.

³ State incentives will be given to those who are married before the age of 27 (T.C. Resmi Gazete, 14 December 2015).

1.6 Life is an Adventure!

Elif is a 28-year-old, young and enthusiastic blogger and social media specialist. She has an outgoing and explorer personality since most of her photos contain a luggage, plane or a touristic place. Started her blog stylehijabb.com in 2014, she turned it into a website where she acts as a social media specialist and conducts various interviews with certain veiling fashion brands. Given the English name of her website and “about me” section, she targets a global audience. Professional photographers accompany her in blogger events, fashion shows and interviews so that she can pose for her blog. Most of her photos contain her smiling happy face, while she enjoys herself and the city.



Picture 5

Elif invests on herself and uses various forms of self-branding techniques. In her photos one can easily witness a tremendous effort to pose, fictionalize a story, build a posture and a certain look. As shown in Picture 5, Elif has a distinct look to the city, sometimes from above, sometimes from behind. Looking at the panorama of Istanbul, from a roof top or a yacht, her gaze is upon the city as she feels thankful and present. These pictures show her trust in herself, while her lowered gaze away from the camera constitutes a kind of modesty. Given the multiplicity of Istanbul, a city with many faces, the locations used in these pictures are not by coincidence. Being on-board on Bosphorus in an expensive yacht or looking at Bosphorus from Çırağan Palace, Ottoman sultan’s residence turned five-star hotel, tells us about her class identity. Elite parts of Istanbul are chosen as background images in her photos and the brands she wears on indicate an upper-class identity. Located in certain places of the city, these settings help Elif to define who and of what value she is both to herself and in terms of how she thinks others view her. She constructs an upper-class identity in her pictures with different tastes and consumer life styles.

Secor (2002) argues that veiling is a significant spatial practice and its significance comes from women’s urban mobility and their construction of Islamic understandings in the city. According to her, power relations especially secularist state and Islamic politics struggle plays a pivotal role in structuring both urban mobility and Islamic knowledge. Given that conservative women pushed to the periphery once, now becoming part of the mainstream culture, they claim

the city back. So, Elif's pictures around the city are not coincidence but designed purposefully stemming from this dichotomy itself.

Elif's mobility is widely seen in her photo-shootings. It is possible to witness various kinds of selves of Elif, walking around the city, in target shooting practice, jumping on cars, motorcycling and photo-taking. It seems she enjoys herself in the pictures and use self-branding tactics. She does not sell anything in her websites but rather acts as a model to certain brands while doing her daily activities and enjoying the city. Most of her photos are taken in an urban atmosphere, mainly Istanbul's urban landscape is framed in different ways, accompanied by trendy consumer goods as Zappavigna (2016) claimed 'fetishized' objects that foreground the photographer's relationship to represented objects in the visual terrain. Product placements among her pictures include Converse as a symbol of coolness, trendy Apple laptop and mobile phone and a Nikon camera as symbols of professionalism, which make us to think beyond the image.

Picture 6



Picture 6

Despite her modern-urban character, she sometimes includes pictures related to her religion to show how she experiences Islam. In Picture 6, her photo in front of Allah (God) sign in a mosque resembles Şüheda's picture with the same sign. However, in Elif's case, we see that she is at the front with a distant look in her eyes. Given that she is in a mosque, she seems contemplative about her liminality between the ephemeral and holy worlds. The size of the sign and Elif are similar giving the idea that they are together and one. There are many posts of her related to her religious side. All the Medina and Kaaba pictures are neatly organized and taken in front of a certain background where she mentions her wish to go there. What is striking in one of the most liked Kaaba pictures is again the background. Skyscrapers rising behind Kaaba reflects the dichotomy between the modern and traditional, sacred/ancient and secular/contemporary in the same urban space.

Elif constructs her identity on her publicity and self-branding as a modern-urban conservative woman. Her physical mobility goes along with the urban mobility of the city.

2. Conclusion

This study conducts a visual analysis of conservative fashion bloggers' blogging practices from a gendered perspective through the narratives of top three bloggers as a case study. Discourse analysis of the visuals is deployed as the main method. Drawing on the combination of Göle (1996)'s argument on the visibility of Muslim identity through veiling with Lacan (1978)'s "scopic gaze" notion, the study demonstrated that creating their own fashion styles as well as their own definitions of Islam, the three bloggers discursively constructed their conservative identities in different ways upon which they also formed their blog narratives. Three paths to conservative women's mobility that are upward, social and urban mobility are revealed through their fashion blog practices.

The visuals posted in the blogs and Instagram feeds give way to the social construction of a modern Muslim woman image to challenge the existing stereotypes like "veiled women are traditional", however without losing their own conservative character. These women's visibility in the public sphere benefits from their mobile characters that are openly shared via their fashion blogs. Defining the boundaries of their public spheres, they formed their identities which coincide in women's conservative clothing styles but vary in their ways of interpretations of online practices in relation to their class and social backgrounds. Şüheda, Zehra and Elif are young, urban, educated females and do not differ in any ways from any other social media user or a fashion blogger in their photo-shootings, but what makes them unique is their negotiation with their conservative identities. Şüheda has a neoliberal, self-made and conservative image and she is visible by her fast-growing success, brand and company where her online identity also builds upon. Based on her photos she shared, it is seen that her identity construction process is twofold: her conservatism breeds on her business woman image, while her business woman image grows on her conservatism. Contrarily, Zehra constructs her online identity on her motherhood, strong family ties and her intimacy with her audience. She gave up her job and stayed at home as a full-time mother. Her conservative identity is transformed by her son's birth into a more open and confident one given the praised motherhood principle of the state. Elif, as an adventurer and modern city flaneur, constructs her identity on her publicity and self-branding as a modern-urban conservative woman, putting a stress on her class identity. Using specific locations of Istanbul, including Bosphorus, Taksim, Karaköy, and also other cities both in Turkey and around the world, she shows how she is right at the centre of the public space emphasizing her urban identity. As most of her pictures are on urban space, her identity construction is one of a strong, young, upper middle-class woman who is active in all spheres of the city, being an indispensable part of it.

Thus, the use of visuals among conservative fashion bloggers vary as their own definitions of Islam, how they practice their religion and construct their identities. This is relevant for a community which is not unified but fragmented. Still there is a mostly shared modest approach in negotiating the celebrity culture they are part of. Visuals used in social networking sites, limit the imagination of the spectators condemning them to the eyes of the other who takes or shares the photographs, and in another aspect, they give chances of different interpretations of different spectators.

To have a better understanding of what is beyond the image, it is also necessary to consider the viewing practices of the spectator. Image is a social construction; a cultural product not necessarily needs to be understood but interpreted by the spectator. Given that meaning is polysemic and never totalized, encoders' production of meaning not ensure that decoders will interpret the message as intended (Hall 2001). Thus, a wider ethnographic research, where in depth-interviews are conducted with the audience would be an asset for a follow-up study.

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