

## **Appendix no. 1: Interview Transcripts**

### **1. Ghadir**

**Duration:** 55:53

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

G: My name is Gadir Hamadir. I'm 22. I'm from Lebanon but when I was 5 years old, my dad got a really good job in Saudi Arabia, so my mom took me and my sisters and we moved to Saudi Arabia. So from 5 till 17 I was living and studying in Saudi Arabia. My school was expat, it had people from all over the world there. We had a really good standard of living with my family there. I attended private school there. Lot of my friends and me included wore lot of brands, eat at fancy restaurants, etc. So I always thought I had it very easy. I was a carefree child. I thought life was so easy. Then for university, in Saudi Arabia, they are segregated for girls alone and boys alone. And they don't really care about women education in Saudi Arabia, maybe now it is changing but before it was like that, so my dad decided that I should come to Lebanon to study. And my mom was also getting tired from being away from her family so we moved back. So when I got back to Lebanon I joined Journalism school and I realized how many problems are there in world that I wasn't aware of, because I grew up in sort of a bubble. I was so happy, so carefree, I had everything, I had my parents and I never cared, but then when I came to Lebanon there were so many problems. There are many protests, people protest against the government. And I started attending meetings and discussions that I wouldn't be able to attend before. Like in Saudi Arabia you cannot really discuss politics or religion, it is forbidden. But when I came to Lebanon it was so different. It has a really good standard of freedom of speech. And then I realized I can think and talk about everything. Because before I just cared about looking good, going out with my friends and when I came to Lebanon i was more into activism and I really enjoy it, I feel like I was born to be a journalist, honestly. I had an internship for English speaking magazine and now I work for another one for year and a half. In summer 2018 I went for Erasmus to Germany and France, I really enjoyed it. In Germany I was the only one wearing a hijab in my group in Germany and honestly I liked being the only Hijabi, I was so comfortable. In France they selected another girl to our group who wears a hijab, she is my friend, but I feel like we view the hijab little differently.

**M: Thank you. Can you tell me, how do you usually spend your day?**

G: So, usually I wake up at 8. I go to the gym next to my house, I work out fo 2 or 3 hours. I do yoga, zumba. Then I come home, I shower, I pray. Then I have little snack and go to my job. Then usually I visit my friend, or hang out with my sister or go to the mall or to a workshop. It actually depends. Or I go to a conference. In my job, I usually write about women issues, women empowerment. And at night I usually go out with my friends and there is a lot of events happening in Lebanon, art exhibitions. Sometimes I just like to go to my friends house and sit on a couch and watch a movie. It really depends on a day. I don't have something fixed you know.

**M: Where do you usually spend the most of your time?**

G: It really depends on a day, I do not really have any fixed routine."

**M: Where do you feel the most comfortable? It can be a place but also a situation.**

G: It is a good question because now I am in a really uncomfortable situation,, thinking what my next step will be. I don't know if I want to stay in Lebanon or if I want to move somewhere else. And I don't know if I should apply for the Masters here or to work. So I don't know what my next step is...But I think I feel the most

comfortable when I am out with my friends from university and we are just talking. And I feel like I am not the only one who is stuck in this phase where I don't know what to do next so I feel safer when I know I am not the only one.

**M: And where do you feel the least comfortable?**

G: I don't like when someone from older generation tries to give me advice and be pushy about it. When someone says: apply to masters or go get a second job. Then I feel pressured. When someone older makes me feel like they know my life better than me.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit more about your family now?**

G: My parents really love each other. They met in Lebanon where they both studied nursing. My mom was working for a while but after she was pregnant with my little sister she got a little tired so she wanted to be with her family more. We all really care about each other, we don't have family problems. And I'm the eldest, I'm 22 and my youngest sister is 8 and we all live in a same house, no one has moved away. Because mostly everyone is at school.

**M: What do you value in your family the most?**

G: We are very honest, we know so much about each other. Even if I did something I think is wrong, I am not afraid to go and tell my parents. I feel like I am not judged with them. I feel like I can say anything to them and really be myself.

**M: What about your friends? What are they like?**

G: I really like my friends and we are really close I know them since I started university like 4 years ago. I value them a lot but at the same time if I leave to study to another country I feel like I would make a new group of friends. I love them a lot, I would do anything for them but I feel like the friends are limited to time and place you are in. So I feel every place and time has a different group of friends.

**M: Is there a type of behaviour you really wouldn't stand in your friend?**

G: Maybe putting me down, when I have achievement and I am proud of something and they make me feel like it is not that important.

**M: Right now I will ask you a little bit more about the traditions that you carry. If you can elaborate more about which are connected to your religion and which to your culture.**

G: On a personal level I try to care more about Islam than my culture. For example in my culture it is not really normal for a girl to come home late at night, but in Islam there is no such thing. Girl can come home anytime she wants, and this is Islamically speaking. So when I go out I would come for example around 3:30 am, because I feel like I wouldn't care that much about my culture as I care about my religion. Because I would wear my hijab in Saudi Arabia the same as I wear it in the Lebanon. I feel like my religion is something that can be applied universally. But culture is very restricted to one area or one group of people. So personally I do not care about the culture but I care about Islamic rules. I think: „give me a really good life on all level“. So I come from a very religious family but I went through a phase when I looked at the literature myself read a lot of books on my religion and I thought if this religion is gonna disappoint me then I am not going to inherit it. And this is actually in Islam as well, you are not supposed to inherit the religion, you are supposed to learn it. So I spoke to many people, I studied a lot and I found out Islam gives me spiritual fulfillment. They say: life does not come with instructions but I feel like in Islam it kind of does. I do not come across any problem that Islam would not help me to find a solution for, that really satisfies me within the religion. So I dont really care about culture, I care

about Islam. Because Islam I can take with me anywhere I go, but culture is limited. I also feel like culture is changing with time and I do not need that in my life.

**M: So which religious traditions exactly do you practice?**

G: I wear Hijab, I pray 5 times a day, I fast during Ramadan, I do not do any sexual activity. I remember when I went to Germany, everyone was so shocked, because they say it is very hard and so on but I tell them look: I wear modesty, I speak modestly, I would for example never crack a sexual joke with a guy. So I am really distant. Of course I have male friends, I go out with them, I sit with them, but with limits. There is a red line I never cross. I never shake hands with guys. I am formal, but I am sweet. I wouldn't go and hug my guy friend nor shake a hand but if they would want anything from me, they know they can call me, we can go out, but you know...limits.

**M: How much time did you spend in Europe?**

G: 10 days in Germany and 10 days in France.

**M: And did you get into any uncomfortable situation because of your beliefs?**

G: So I remember one time me and one guy, he is Syrian but he lives in Germany we were just talking about Halal food and how we wanted to eat halal food. And then this girl comes to me, she is Lebanese, but christian, she is my friend. But there she cornered me and said: I feel like you are smarter than that, why do you care so much about eating halal. Do you think God will put you in hell for eating non-halal meal?" I wasn't uncomfortable because my beliefs were shaken but I was uncomfortable because she was my friend and she was telling me this. Other times when I was feeling uncomfortable was when other people wanted to go to bars and clubs and I kept trying to explain to them that I don't wanna go for religious reasons. But because they were so nice they kept telling me, they don't wanna go if I don't wanna go, so I didn't wanna offend them. So I told them that I really like them, I want to be with them but just not to go to places that really oppose my religion. But these were like minor things. And also with guys wanting to kiss my cheeks. So I wanted to show them I respect them but I really cannot do that. But at the end of the trip we really understood each other and we were joking about how the situation was before.

**M: So you just felt at times that you didn't really feel understood?**

G: Yes, I wanted them to understand but at the same time I didn't want to offend them. I wanted to say: I don't drink alcohol but I am not judging you for drinking, I don't think you are sinning or anything. But I don't wanna do it. So I think this is what stressed me out. I didn't wanna hurt their feelings but you know I was lucky with this group of people, they were a good bunch.

**M: Now I will ask you something about clothing, what does clothing mean to you?**

G: The hijab is basically about being modest. It is about: you should view me as a human being, not just an object to admire because of its beauty. And I think the society that embraces uncovering kind of attack me for covering and saying covering is oppressive. Who put a standard that a human development and advancement and freedom is about me walking around with my breasts being uncovered?! I don't get it. I feel like hijab privates my sexuality. And what does it mean to say that covering of women's sexuality is being oppressive, like what does it say about women sexuality? At the same time I dress as modestly as I can. I wear skinny jeans, but not too skinny, I wear long shirts but not too long. I put a little bit of make-up but not red lipstick and lots of make up. I try to balance. I am modest but at the same time I am modern. Right now I enjoy my jeans and make up but maybe in a future I hope I will be able to dress more and more modestly.

**M: And how important is the clothing on other people?**

G: I have friends who are Jewish, Christian, atheist, homosexual, transgender. I feel like the rules I have on myself, I do not expect other people to apply them on themselves. I feel like hijab makes me really confident and content with myself. I don't have to worry about guys catcalling or if I am doing a presentation at work or at university I feel like people listen just for the content of my work. So that makes me feel at peace with myself and with addition of praying...the prayer is all about submitting everything to God. And sometimes when I am stressed from work, I remember everything is in God's hands so I can relax. And all those rules I just apply them to myself. So I don't care if my friend is wearing a hijab or not.

**M: Do you think you are making a statement with your clothing?**

G: Yes. Because where I work it is not a Muslim area. And some people think Muslim women are uneducated. So I think just me being well-educated, well-read, participating in a day-to-day live alone breaks the stereotype. So I wouldn't go to someone and try to convince them that they use stereotypes. I have a car, I have a job, I go out. My religion gives me so much freedom. If people really looked at hijab they would see it is something so powerful and so liberating. It empowers me so much.

**M: What does hijab particularly mean to you?**

G: It means so many things to me actually. It means submitting to God. It also means when I am in the world, chasing my dreams, I don't want anyone to objectify me. I feel like right now, the world is calling for stopping objectifying the women. And I feel like this is exactly what Hijab does. It doesn't reduce me just to a body. I still do not wear hijab appropriately, like I said I still wear jeans and so on. But I am not someone if you look at me that you would say: oh she looks so sexy. I am not judging women who dress sexy but for me personally it does not make sense for someone to dress in a sexy way and then come and say: „why are you calling me sexy?“. So if I walk around with my hijab on and people are talking to me, they are talking to me because of my the content of my work or my character. So they can appreciate my work, because I do not give them a chance to view me as a sexual object. I respect myself.

**M: Next question I feel like you have already answered but just to make sure, do you feel like veiling is more part of your religion or your culture?**

G: Religion, definitely.

**M: Have you ever faced any struggles because of your choice to veil?**

G: Maybe because I live in the Middle East, not really. But actually here in Lebanon in some TV stations they do not allow veiled Muslim women to appear on the screen. But at the same time those are stations I would not want to work in because of their poor content. But when I was in France I felt like everyone was staring at me. I would just smile back, because I didn't know what to do. And I know, maybe for some people, they see someone in the hijab for the very first time, so it is very normal for them to look, so I am sure they do not mean any harm.

**M: Can you elaborate a little more on this TV stations issue?**

G: I do not think it is a written rule. Because every time they check your CV and say that they will get back to you. But it is known about specific TV stations that they would never hire a veiled woman. So many people have tried and also try to corner them, but they would just close it.

**M: And why do you think it is that?**

G: Maybe at the time of Islamophobia...I guess some people are just racist. And it goes both ways. There are other stations who do not hire women who do not veil. And I feel like both are in the wrong. Because veil is not something that makes you a good journalist.

**M: Let's focus on the online activity now. Can you estimate how much time you spend on social media a day?**

G: Well I try not to use it that much. But I like to check Instagram quite a lot and also I read a lot of books on my iPhone. I would say like 3-4 hours a day. I also look at religious content on social media. I follow the news on Facebook, Twitter, etc. So I also use it as a part of my job, to look at the stories and ideas.

**M: Which platforms do you use the most?**

G: Facebook but I also use Instagram a lot.

**M: What is the purpose for you of using these apps?**

G: Sometimes you are stuck in traffic or bored at home and I get the urge to use it. But I also try to use it in a positive ways, not just to look at memes.

**M: Are you part of any groups on Facebook concerning culture, religion, politics?**

G: Not really. I just read everything in general. I also like some Christian pages. I also follow the Lebanese patron Saint for example. I do not only read Islamic content.

**M: Do you often discuss culture, religion, politics online?**

G: Not really because some people on social media just want to argue for the sake of arguing. I feel like arguments on social media are pointless, especially if I really do not know the person.

**M: And if there is any interesting content related to culture, religion, politics, do you share it?**

G: For example I am against homosexuality, but I do have many homosexual friends. So if they straight up ask me why I am against it, I can give them many reasons why I do not support it, but at the same time I do not want to be rude or hurt their feelings. So I wouldnt say something like: homosexuality is stupid, but something like: I feel like homosexuality is taken out of context, is being exaggerated. But I would not share a content that would be controversial and would cause a lot of comments on my social media. I usually share the articles that I think are really interesting but controversial.

**M: Would you say social media was helpful?**

G: Definitely. I do not think there would be a journalism nowadays without it.

**M: On the other hand, have you ever faced any struggles on social media or caused by them?**

G: I see friends arguing online. But I do not like forcing my views on anyone.

**M: Do you establish intercultural contact using social media?**

G: Yes, especially at the work conferences I always exchange Facebook contacts and stay in touch. With my European friends we still have a group chat and share photos from our lives almost every other day.

**M: Do you follow any content on social media related specifically to veiling?**

G: Yes, I follow so many actually. Because sometimes I wear my jeans and my shirt and do not know which hijab to wear because it also has to suit my purse and my shoes. So sometimes I go to those pages on Instagram that are related to hijab fashion to get inspired. Although not all the models wear the hijab properly, because hijab is not a trend. It is supposed to cover our beauty not to emphasize it.

**M: Can you name some of the pages you follow?**

G: For example Omaima and some local boutiques.

**M: Do you follow any other content about veiling besides the hijab fashion?**

G: Sometimes I see a quote about hijab that I think is really good, so then I will share it. But not too much.

**M: How do you feel your culture and religion is represented in the media in your country?**

G: I feel like right now there is a balance. There are some media outlets that show women as oppressed by their husbands, fathers or religious leaders. And maybe there is a tiny minority of women being oppressed like this but it is still a minority. I have a friend from Pakistan and she is not even Muslim and her father forced her to wear a cover everywhere. But that doesn't mean every Pakistani father forces their daughters to wear it. So I feel like media sometimes are a bit biased. Why is everyone suddenly so interested if I cover my head or not. How does that affect anyone but myself. If we are telling women it is ok to walk around half naked, if we have naked beaches...No one is talking about people who shave their heads, why do they talk about people who cover their heads. I do not understand what is happening. If you look at terrorism rates, very few are caused by Islam. But I do have many friends around me who are not from the same religion and I am very first hijabi that they met and they are very supportive of my choices, so I feel like I am just lucky in this extent.

**M: And how do you feel it is represented internationally?**

G: I feel like if they found one girl in a million who wears a hijab who is forced to do so, they would make a story out of it. And not focus on the millions who wear it as their choice. And I really do not know the reason.

**M: Do you feel like the overall portrayal of the media may change someone's negotiation of veiling behavior? Do you think media has this kind of power?**

G: This takes me back to what I said about culture and religion. If I was veiled for culture reasons then maybe, if I lived in Europe for example. But I feel like my religion is really universal, I can apply it everywhere. I feel like I can be anywhere in the world and I would still believe the same things.

**M: I have a very last question. If you can tell me, what your core values are?**

G: I try not to gossip around. I feel like I am an ambassador for Islam. I try my best to be honest, to uplift others. Good morals. So as our prophet Mohammad said: I was only sent so that my nation would have good morals and values.

**M: So thank you so much for your time. It has been extremely helpful and I definitely learnt a lot.**

## **2. Gofran**

**Duration: 1:01**

**M: Do you agree with being recorded?**

G: Yes.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

G: So my name is GhofranAkil, I am Lebanese, I was born in Colombia but then we moved to Saida in Lebanon, it is a city in South Lebanon and I grew up there. Then I studied in Beirut graphic design and media and communication and this is where I met my husband and after a while he moved to Switzerland to do his Masters and PhD and when I graduated I moved there as well and we got married. After I moved here I started working in a small graphic studio and I wanted to do my Masters there, because they have one of the best programs for graphic design here. And I am now designing a game, so that is a project I am working on right now. I also work part-time in a small start up in Geneva and we focus on augmented reality. I am 26 years old now.

**M: How did you spend your weekend?**

G: So I live in Lausanne now and my husband lives in another canton in Switzerland right now, because he is working there. So we do not live together but every weekend he comes back. Usually what we do is some cleaning of the house, grocery shopping and then we go out. I try to enjoy my weekends and not to be working. Maybe a little bit of hiking.

**M: How do you usually spend your day?**

G: From Monday till Thursday I usually work on my project, of course I do some cooking as well. I really enjoy cooking, it is one of my favorite things to do. So usually I wake up at 6:30, I pray, I have a coffee and then by 9 I am usually at school to work on my project and I am usually at home by 5 pm. I cook a bit, I work a bit, maybe read something. And I sleep pretty early, around 22:30 usually.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit more about where you lived before, for how long?**

G: I was born in Colombia, in Bogotá. I lived there for 3 years and then my parents decided that it is better for us to move back to Lebanon to learn some arabic and more about our religion. We lived in Saida. Around 9 i started to wear my veil. Saida is kinda big city, but mostly muslim. And almost everyone in my surroundings was veiling. So I was used to that image. But at my class it was always only me and two or three other girls with a hijab. So I remember when I told my mom and dad that I want to wear it, they told me it is my choice. My sisters were against it but I just wanted to do it not really sure why but I just felt like it. In 2006 we decided to move to Beirut and it is different because Beirut is more mixed and more multicultural. And I loved it, I gained lot of new friends, experiences, it was really nice. But it was too noisy for my parents, so they decided to move back to Saida, but I wanted to stay Beirut for the last year of my high school. So I started commuting from Saida to Beirut every day. And then for university I moved to live in Beirut alone. I actually started to do biology and medicine before, because I was kind of the nerd of the family, so it was expected from me to become a doctor. But I didnt like it so one day I woke up and decided this is not what I wanted to study so I just switched majors to graphic design. And at home during lunch I just casually mentioned that I switched the majors and my parents were a bit shocked but for me I thought it is my decision but they got over it easily, they just still do not understand what graphic design really is haha. So I felt like I kind of have to make it up for them and signed up for Media and communcation as well. At 2011 I met my husband and we kept dating for a year and then he moved to Switzerland to do his PhD...and you know long distance can be tough sometimes. In 2014 we got engaged, so after that he could see me without hijab with some limitations. In 2016 I graduated and got married in August and moved to Switzerland. And now I live in the French part of Switzerland. Right now we are both focusing on our careers.

**M: Where do you usually spend most of your time?**

G: I love my house and in my free time, I usually spend it here. If I am not here or at school, or work, I spend time in the nature around here. Walk around the lake with friends and so on.

**M: Where do you feel the most comfortable?**

G: I have two answers. In Switzerland it is either when I am home with my husband and maybe in the evening we have some friends over or when I am at work and I am doing something I like, so I do not feel the time passing. When I am in Lebanon, it is probably around my university because it is a place where I discovered myself.

**M: Where do you feel the least comfortable?**

G: It took me a while to get used to Switzerland, they are very nice people in general, especially in the French part but some people can be a bit racist sometimes. One of the first situations I was in a supermarket and a fairly old lady started shouting at me and spitting at me for no reason and I was shocked and could not answer anything more but: This is not nice. It happens rarely, but it happens. So usually when this happens, I have a very strong personality but in these cases I sometimes just freeze, so that is a little bit stressful.

**M: Can you estimate how often this happens?**

G: More or less I am a positive person, so maybe when someone is staring I just think that it is normal. So I am not gonna count these moments but I have been living here for 2 years and around 8 months, and this happened around 6 times, 7 maximum. So not very frequently you can say.

**M: So most of the time you are content with your life in Switzerland?**

G: I am very happy. For example Beirut is very loud, it never sleeps. I love Beirut. But I also love a bit of regulations, so I really like Switzerland in that case.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about your family now?**

G: So we are five girls and my young Brother. My eldest sister is 32 and the youngest sibling, my brother, is 11. If you look at the girls separately, we are very different. Maybe we look a bit alike, but personality is very different. I enjoy spending time with all of them. Especially the eldest one. We are very close. For example my other sister, she is still a believer but a year ago, she removed her hijab. It was a big struggle for her, it was hard for my parents to accept, because of the fact that she would be stigmatized and bullied. Because people in the community talk a lot, so my parents did not want her to be part of that talk and also my dad did not want to be part of that talk. Because people will say: „Daughter of Hassan removed her hijab“ and especially the people from the small town. It took a lot of courage for my sister to make that decision and I was like a bridge between her and my parents. It was interesting for them to see that I was helping her out, because I really like hijab and the idea of wearing it. That is my second sister, she is not married, she is very successful in her career and she has been dating her boyfriend for around 10 years. My second sister she has three children, she is happily married, she also graduated from the Lebanese university. My other sister is hilarious, she is a very social person and very famous on a social media actually. She studied translation and now she is job hunting. The other one is still at high school. So all my sisters besides the one I told you about wear hijab, they wear it in a term I do not like using: the cool hijabi or the modern one. I do not believe there should be such a term you know. As a woman you can decide what to wear and how to wear it, if from head to toe or just a small one.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit more about the problems in the community if a woman decides not to wear a veil?**

G: What people do not understand and this is generally speaking is that you can be wearing a hijab and not respecting what it means and you can be not wearing a hijab but be one of the best women. Especially when you live in a society that is surrounded by Muslims, it is something that you do not think about and adjust to it, it is somehow expected from you. But after a while, when you are at a university for example, you can be convinced to not wear a hijab anymore and want to remove it and then people just start talking about you disrespecting the religion. If you decide to wear it, it is a lifelong commitment for some people which I highly disagree with. Especially it frustrates me when men speak about it because as a man you are not asked or advised to wear it so please shut up haha. It is not your struggle. So we have some waves of women removing the hijab and then some



of waves of wearing the hijab. I think around the age of 18 when they start the university, they question the decision the most.

**M: Can you tell me what you value in your family?**

G: Even though we are very different people, we really do not want to hurt each other. It took us a while to understand, we are all individuals and to respect each other's beliefs. Some of us are already there and some are starting and evolving to get there. So it is a bit difficult. I have more or less conservative parents but not so much. Because for example not every household let their children to date and we were allowed to date or come back after midnight. The parents really trust us, sometimes bit too much haha. We do have our problems of course, but we do really have fun, we laugh a lot. For our dad the most important thing for us is to really be happy and not hide anything from each other. We try to act as if we respect other's decisions.

**M: What about your friends then?**

G: In Beirut, because I am a graphic designer I spend most of the time in the department and I have my own beliefs, I do have little friends here and there. I have two great girlfriends there who I have fun conversations with and on the other hand I have one extremely mature friend who is actually atheistic I think but for me she was one of the best influences in my life. We really could talk about everything and she was really respectful and for me she was the person I spend most of the time with. But of course I have my religious beliefs so sometimes you feel like you need to spend time with someone who is like you, so sometimes these friends were a little bit out of my comfort zone you can say. As for here, I am very sociable person... so when I moved to Switzerland it was a bit hard, because my friends here were friends of my husband or their spouses. Even though they are incredibly amazing women, we have the same backgrounds, we do the same university, but I felt happier when I met some people in the conferences such as designers and then we hit it off. Even though we might not have the same values but sometimes at a certain age you just need to have one friend that you share all of stuff with. My closest friend I have is a friend from school and he is never shy to express what he feels and what he believes but he never ever disrespected my beliefs. He always hears me out, he does not say anything disrespectful and this is what drove me to get closer to him.

**M: What do you value in a friend then?**

G: I think at this age and time we are mature enough to respect each other's beliefs, as long as you do that I can be a friend. Respect, trust.

**M: Is there a type of behavior you wouldn't stand in a friend?**

G: Just like be yourself, you know. And also when someone claims to be openminded and liberal and at the same time they are really ignorant people.

**M: Can you tell me little bit more about your religious and culture traditions that you carry?**

G: The daily ones is a prayer five times a day. I fast I do ramadan as well. Occassionally, rarely I read some Quran. Monthly or weekly I go to this gathering where you read a prayer.

**M: Now about clothing. What does clothing mean to you?**

G: As a woman living here, you always feel like you are a representative for all the Muslim women around the world. So I try my best not to wear any dark colours and to always be neat and to be a bit fashionable. I try to wear what is usually called modest clothes.

**M: Can you estimate how much attention you pay to clothing?**

G: I do not have so much time. I hate shopping. I wanna wake up and have some nice clothes in my closet. And that is not gonna happen even when I pray 5 times a day haha. What I try to do is I try to buy something that is comfortable but also nice and modest. But I cannot sleep without knowing what to wear next day because I want to be on a Schedule.

**M: How much attention you pay to the clothing of others?**

G: I was shocked when I came here and I saw my friends were wearing the same clothes for like two or three consecutive days. But I just appreciate when someone dresses nicely but not too much.

**M: Do you think you are making a statement with the way you are dressed?**

G: I actually do dress differently here than in Lebanon, sometimes. Here I am less conservative. In Lebanon they have levels: you are good hijabi, you are ok hijabi, etc. So this is why in Lebanon you need to take more care how people are gonna look at you. People in some religious communities would look and compare. When I am here, I feel more comfortable. I really believe that woman can literally wear anything she wants to wear, because despite being a Muslim woman, I am a woman first. And us as woman we have it kind of hard in the world in general because of all the patriarchy, especially Muslim women. Because everyone expects that we were forced to wear hijab by our husbands or fathers, as a Lebanese woman I was not forced by anyone. It was my choice, I just want to wear anything that makes me comfortable. I just want to wear it nicely, so maybe people can say: Oh Muslim woman can wear nice things.

**M: So you mentioned, in Lebanon, they kind of scale you by the way you wear your hijab. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?**

G: In some religious communities it works in a way, the longer veil you wear, the better Muslim woman you are. And this actually frustrates me a lot. You can actually wear shorts and a top and have more morals than some hijabi. During my studies I did some internships in some more christian neighborhoods and I had two comments of hatred. One guy looked at me and said: „When did we open a mosque here?“ „Wait for the bomb to come...“. So in some Muslim communities you can be criticized by the way you wear it and in some non-muslim places you can be criticized for wearing it. Also in the job world, it is also affecting. For example my sister would be invited to a job interview because of her CV and they would be really excited to meet her and then when she goes there, even though it is working with the food safety and you have to wear a hat, she is forced to take off her hijab. And at some other places they prefer if you do not wear a hijab, even when a boss is a Muslim but at some conservative companies they would even ask you to wear it, for example teachers.

**M: What does hijab mean to you?**

G: It represents culture and religion. In Lebanon it is both in one. For example in England it was part of their culture for a very long time as well even though they are not muslims. Also modesty and decency. For Muslims we are advised to wear it for the fact that it is a protection from the patriarchy. God does not want women to be judged by their appearance, sexuality or being objectified. But now of course it is highly criticized.

**M: Yes. How do you feel wearing it in Europe?**

G: In the french part of Switzerland, I feel like they are more open. And they are more or less accepting me, because now I understand the language. Lausanne also has some important schools here, so there is lot of especially Iranians, so people here are used to see Muslim women more. Walking here I would see Muslim women frequently. But when I go to visit my husband in the German part, because he lives in a small town. I feel

very self conscious. In a train everyone is looking at me and it makes me really uncomfortable. And also in Stuttgart, people were also calling me names.

**M: Have you visited some countries in Europe? Did you experience this elsewhere?**

G: So I went to Netherlands, for me it was fine and I really enjoyed my time. When I went to Paris, it was touristy time, so I was not really with the locals. And Germany, but I have good experience.

**M: Do you feel like veiling is more part of your religion or your culture?**

G: For me it became part of my religion, because it was part of my culture. Being from the Middle East it was both for me. But when you see for example Virgin Mary, the pictures, she was also wearing a veil. People on old pictures of England were wearing a hijab. So for me it is both.

**M: Also you partly answered that already, but did you face any struggles because of your decision to veil?**

G: In a work place I already faced that in Lebanon, but yes. Because you have disconnotation about it. For example when I came here, they had this political campaign that had nothing to do with Muslims. It was about the right of the third generation to get the nationality easier. But the far-right campaign had a woman with burqa and it said something extremist there I can not really remember. For me it was shocking. Sometimes they are using a hijab with a very bad connotation. One time, I came back to Lebanon. And on the airport they took me aside and let me wait for like 2-3 hours till the immigration office opened. It was 6am and I had to wait till 9. And when I started talking to the police officer, I talked with her in English and French and I explained I am a student and I am working and then she apologized for putting me to this situation but she had already opened a file so she could not let me move. But suddenly she became nice when she saw that I am educated and speak languages. But for me this was extremely insulting, even though I did not show it. So the imagery some people have about muslim women is that they are oppressed and ignorant. But once they know that you are educated, they treat you differently.

**M: I am very sorry this happened. Did you also notice some more political campaigns in Switzerland?**

G: Yes I think there were more. But not all swiss people are like that. The far-right ones can use it. But I have other swiss friends who would actually defend me and accuse others for being racist.

**M: Because that is also part of the reason why I am doing this research. Because some far-right political parties were misusing the symbol as well even though the Muslim community in Czech republic is really low. So I just wanted to see if this is a trend in Europe and how you feel about that.**

G: Yes, I think in the US it was after 9/11 and in Europe after other attacks. And partly I understand. But then in the media and everywhere you see this wrong portrayal of muslims. But nowadays you can literally research some more information about muslims if you would want. Maybe for older generation I would be more accepting but for this generation I cannot really understand.

**M: Let's move to the online activity now. Can you estimate how much time do you spend on social media?**

G: I have Facebook, I have Instagram. I used to be really active on Snapchat, sending pictures to my sisters but not anymore. Not much time actually. Sometimes I do scrolling on the Facebook. On Instagram mostly for the memes and some designers that I follow. I do not really like social media that much.

**M: So you use Instagram mostly?**

G: You can say I am passively active there. I do not post much but I like to see the stuff that is there.

**M: So what is the purpose of you using these apps?**

G: As a human it is for fun mostly. I like to see funny stuff, funny videos. As a designer I seek inspiration.

**M: Are you part of any fan-groups concerning culture/religion/politics?**

G: On Instagram there are some pages that have some funny memes about Muslim community and the struggles that we face and I find that hilarious. As for religion, not really.

**M: So you do not often discuss these things online?**

G: No. You do not know who you are targeting, maybe you do not have same level of maturity, so you do not want to fall in that trap on social media, so I prefer not to.

**M: Would you say social media was of any help to you when moving to another country?**

G: Not really, but I use social media to stay in contact with my family and friends in Lebanon.

**M: Did you ever face any struggles in the online world?**

G: No, never.

**M: Do you establish intercultural contact using these apps?**

G: Yes, whenever I am out on the conference for example. But we do not directly talk about culture or something. We just follow each others work.

**M: In online world do you follow any content about veiling?**

G: Maybe just two pages. And then hijabi funny stuff. Like what do you face as a muslim woman in general. There is a page called muslimgirl and it is extremely inspiring. For hijabi fashion, I do not really care about that. Because sometimes I feel like they are using the hijab in a way I do not like that much, just for the fashion.

**M: How do you feel your religion is represented in the media?**

G: I do not really watch the news so much, like on Tv. But in general I feel in Europe or in the US, you see the moveis. It really hurts when for example I am watching a movie and they portray Beirut as a dessert. We do not have a dessert in Lebanon!! Or when they talk about civil war, they portray US that comes there to the rescue but that is not true. Or when the bad guy is always an Arab man. Also I am bothered when they mix Arab and Muslim as a same thing. For example in Lebanon, half of people is christian. Not every Muslim person is Arab person and other way around. So after 9/11 or ISIS there is lot of bad connotations. And muslim women are always portrayed as oppressed which I hate because I am a feminist. It hurts me when another feminist talks about another muslim girl in a way she is being oppressed.

**M: Do you think that the overall portrayal of the media have the power to change your negotiation of veiling behavior?**

G: Sometimes you feel like you need to try harder to explain yourself more. It is not my job everyday to wake up and go to work and explain to everyone my clothing. I do not want to do that but sometimes I feel forced to do that. Sometimes when something happens, for example the terrorist attacks in Paris, I feel people were really judging me And then you feel like apologizing for something you did not have your hand in.

**M: Did you ever come to a point where you were thinking of not wearing a hijab?**

G: It is not that I would want to remove it. Sometimes I would like to experience it just for a day if people would view me differently if I did not wear it. So it just crossed my mind for the experience but I would not want to remove it. It is part of my personality and if people do not want to understand that then screw them. It is 2019 we need to be a little more understanding.

**M: I have very last question now. What would you say your core values are?**

G: Never change for anyone, that is the most important. Always be confident with what you do, then people respect you more. I always respect everyone even when I do not have the same values.

**M: I would like to really thank you. It was extremely helpful. Do you have any questions?**

G: Yes you mentioned there is not many Muslims in Czech republic. How do they look at Muslim women there?

M: So it is also part of the reason why I am doing this research, because in Czech republic there is few far-right parties that are trying to misuse this imagery to gain votes.

### **3. Mahrukh**

**Duration:** 1:35:00

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

Mah: I am 36 years old and I am from Pakistan, from the eastern part, which is close to Afghanistan and Iran border, so you can say that is little bit more conservative than elsewhere. I am a teacher, I teach business english.

**M: When did you move here?**

Mah: Back in 2009, in November it will be 10 years.

**M: Why did you move here?**

Mah: It is kind of hard question for me, I do not know how much I want to be open about it, it was arranged marriage. Somebody finds you somebody and you get married to that person. We are not together anymore.

**M: So during that time you didnt live in another country?**

Mah: No, just here.

**M: And did you move to Prague directly? Or any other city.**

Mah: Directly to Prague.

**M: Do you like Prague so far?**

Mah: yes, it is one of the reasons why I stayed. There is a greater freedom for women

**M: And when you got here you started working already?**

Mah: It took me longer because I had master degree in business and finance and I worked in a bank on a very good position but I couldnt find job here because of the language barrier and so it took me long. It was also during the time there was the financial crises, so it took some time to find a job. Then I had to change my carrier altogether. I wasnt happy with the bank anyway. So I did certificates for teaching English so I became a certified teacher for companies here.

**M: How did you spend your weekend?**

Mah: I went for meditation actually. I went for three day long meditation and it was in MnichovoHradiště and there is a monastery there and it was pretty intense, three days of meditation. We woke up at 5 and meditated till 10 at night. It was organised by a buddhist group and they provide this opportunity for people to sit down and take care of your mind.

**M: How do you usually spend your day?**

Mah: Normal day is a teaching day, I teach adults in different companies. So it varies, for example today I started at 7, sometimes at 8 or 9. I go to one company, I work 2-3 hours there, it depends. Then I sometimes have a break like today and then I do whatever I like and plan for another lessons. So this is usually how my days go. Then during the day I sometimes stay at home, I do more meditation, I cook. Now that I think of it I have quite busy days.

**M: What would you say your core values are?**

Mah: Oh..wow. That is a very deep question. At this moment, the first word that is coming to my mind is freedom. Staying true to myself, that I know myself in different situations in life and then staying true with that. I say what I feel. But at the same time, it also means I need to respect other person, who at the same time have their own values. Knowing myself and respecting other people and finding mutual ground.

**M: Now lets talk about your environment. Where do you usually spend most of your time?**

Mah: In different companies. I move a lot from one company to another. Then home, I am more introvert. So I like to go home, go to cafe alone, read a book, surf internet or waste my time on social media haha. Then usually it is just meeting one friend or nobody.

**M: Where do you feel the most comfortable?**

Mah: Since I have been spending lot of time doing meditation, I would say when I sit down and I am with myself. Wow...now I am just realizing it has become such integral part of my life. So during meditation, it can be anywhere, either meditation centre or at home. Then when I am revitalized I like to be out in a park or with one friend.

**M: Where do you feel the least comfortable?**

Mah: I am not very comfortable with many people around. I am ok in a crowd, but when there is a lot of people, lot of chatting around, I listen, but I do not actively participate. But when I am expected from other people or myself to participate, I do not feel that comfortable. I just need some time to step back.

**M: Can you tell me little bit about your family?**

Mah: We are four siblings, Brother is older than I and then my sisters are younger. My mom, and my dad passed two years ago.

**M: Do you stay in contact with them?**

Mah: Yes, I meet them every year.

**M: What do you value in them?**

Mah: I think the strong bond, I know they stand behind me, that they have my back basically. We are lucky compare to other families in Pakistan, other families try to be closed up, so my family is little more openminded just to take another view to see things from the other side. So I feel very lucky because not many people have that, here or elsewhere.

**M: What about your friends?**

Mah: I do not have a very big group, I have a circle of people I know. But very close friends I would say I have two in Czech republic, one is a guy, other is a girl. The girl is a married woman, with kids, white woman and white guy haha just to be clear. Unfortunately I am not in much contact with my friends in Pakistan, probably because of the distance and time. They are good friends.

**M: What do you value in them?**

Mah: Now that I am talking about it, what I value in them is that they are able to see or at least listen and see the other point of view. They are able to be open. Thats probably the reason we became friends.

**M: Is there type of behavior you wouldnt stand in a friend?**

Mah: Closeminded people, yeah. If someone does not want to see another Picture. I cant understand it.

**M: Who do you usually spend most of your time with?**

Mah: With this guy friend I have I guess. Once and twice a week.

**M: Do you carry any traditions that you practice? Religious or culture? Can you elaborate more?**

Mah: I think over time I became this international person with international culture I would say haha. I see myself as Citizen of the world. I am not attached to any culture I would say. It happened over time, I am not forcing anything and also I am not rejecting anything. So I would say I am not strictly following any culture or any religion anymore. It doesn't mean I have anything against it. So for example, Easter is coming, it doesn't mean I am celebrating it, but if someone comes with pomlázka haha I would have fun and enjoy it. Then I go for meditation, many of these groups are buddhists, so I am in their circle but I am not a buddhist, I am not practicing their rituals and I am there and I do not mind. I am not really practicing any concept.

**M: Were you born to religious family?**

Mah: Yes. They are not extremely religious, ultra muslim, but not very modern. If we talk in Pakistani context, they are somewhere in the middle. My mom is more religious, my one sister practices religion, I used to practice until I was 26. My other sister was never interested. Because when you come from religious family, you are taught these practices, go to religious places. But I think my mom gave up on her haha, the same is with my Brother.

**M: So it is not a problem with the community there?**

Mah: It really depends where you live. So we come from the South, where there is more tolerance towards other ideologies. Now overtime we moved to other city that is on the East, closer to Afghanistan, so there it is more conservative. And that also means there is less tolerance. So the reality is, when you do not practice religion, the tolerance is less. But if you come to the South, where my relatives come from, the tolerance is much higher when you do not practice.

**M: So what was the transition for you? Did you use to pray five times a day before and fast during rammadan? Did you practice that even after you moved to Prague?**

Mah: If you are born into certain concept, ideology, it is all around you, you just see that Picture, it is the only Picture you see, the only reality, that does not mean it is bad, but you just think it is this. I thought this is it, this is life. We never traveled outside Pakistan, it is really hard to travel outside Pakistan. Again, there were times I practiced more, I prayed more frequently and I liked it. It was actually quite like meditation. Because you are in this fast life and then you have this ten minutes that you can just switch off and you don't have to talk to people, you don't have to do anything, fix anything, run after anything. It is a luxury in these days, isn't it? So now I see it like this. I think that was reason that I perhaps liked it. And then there were more like spiritual reasons, that I got deeper, I wanted to know more about myself and spirituality. Spirituality was always important in my family, we always talked about that in my family. That was also the time I started to wear scarf, I had longer sleeves. It was my own decision. Just to clarify, there are two things in my culture, one is your cultural way of covering your head, that is part of your dresscode, another is your religious way of covering your head, and that is another thing. So I was covering my head for culture reasons, it can be loose, however you want. But if you wear it according to religion, it has its own protocol, neck shouldn't be shown, not the hairline. So in some families, you would see it as cultural and religious thing both. So I chose to wear the religious one and I liked it, then I went to hotter city for banking training. And it was really hot, so it started to be bothersome. It was the point probably where I decided to leave it haha.

**M: That is the first time I am hearing of this aspect, it sounds also really important haha.**

Mah: Yes for me it was really like that haha. But I still continued to wear the loose headscarf for religious reasons. Maybe that was the time when the transition was already on the way. Because I started questioning

myself, the fact if I really need to wear the headscarf. Is it that important? Because for me the spirituality is more important than the traditions, the rituals. In my opinion, there were other deeper values of the religion, than the dresscode. So I started to discover that side more, than just applying it on myself. So that was the point I stopped wearing it for religious reasons. Again, I do not have anything against it. Maybe I do not need a dresscode, I would just make my own, or maybe there is none. So I started to explore that spiritual side more, the definition. I still used to pray, not very regularly. So I started to explore it from my own point of view. Why do I pray, what does it mean to me, what is the reason, what value it brings to my life. And what happened was, I started praying less. Because I started to pray more in a row, than sitting for five times. For me it was ok, you are still connected to God and to yourself. I am doing ok, if I miss two prayers from five, if I am still connected to myself, it is fine. And then I moved here, I used to fast, and here I was like oh this is new. Of course, I bring my values and I practiced, because it kept me grounded and gave me peace. Now, what started happening I started to look at the other reality, the different Picture. Wow, there is no religion here, how did that happen haha. What I found as value in this country is, people just find their own values in life, without religion defining it. Of course it happened over centuries. But what was eyeopening for me is, that society can function completely fine without religion to define it. They are doing much better than anywhere else, it is a healthy society, people respect each other and there is no religion?! And that was the point I started questioning myself. I saw that society can work, humans can live with peacefully even without religion. I saw it in front of my eyes. Would I be able to work normally if I stopped practicing? What happens then? If I keep in my mind not to hurt myself and others, I can work without religion. The scarf was already out at this point, and the practice also kind of faded away. One more thing about the veil, when I got back to my city where it is not so hot, I still wore the scarf, we call it chada, I still had that. For me it was strictly just for that region, not for religion. That city was always more conservative. So the other city, the hotter one, is more open and big, so there I stopped wearing it. Then when I got here I figured I do not even have to carry my shal with me. So with my city when I go there I still wear the headscarf, it is the cultural dresscode, the requirement. When I do it there, I do feel powerful! When I follow their requirements from me, it doesnt mean I have to follow everything, but just the basic cultural needs, then I can play my card, I do feel more powerful, there is a barter, people accept me. So this is how I feel. When I move to the other city, I do not have to wear the other scarf anymore. Now things change, I have to bring something else in here, just to be more productive, more accepted, more fit. We always try to be accepted, to fit in. Now I wear european clothes and again the point is, you want to fit in. I do not want people to be like: Mahrukh and her scarf. There is more to Mahrukh than her scarf right. I am also a shy person. I wouldnt be able to carry myself easily with a scarf in foreign country, so that was also a reason. It means I want to fit in. So that is my insecurity, but at the same time I do not feel the need. So maybe there is no insecurity, maybe I know myself a lot, so I know I do not have to wear it.

**M: What does clothing mean to you in general?**

Mah: I like to dress up. Through time I came to: I like to dress up for myself..good haha. I finally found the strength to dress up for me and not other people. So I had always been into colours, type of clothes that brought out joy in me. So for me clothing is part of me, it brings lot of fun and joy. So in Pakistan, you can go through whole cloth-making proces..where you choose the fabric, you match the colors, the tailor measures you and make it according to your wish. So the positive thing about that is, nobody looks like that and you have joy in this. So you have these strict cultural boundries but you can play in those boundries. So I miss it to be honest. So



whenever I go home, I buy the fabric and go through proces again haha. What is here, it is more chilled for me. I just buy two jeans and two tops and I can just like mix and match. So for me this is clothing is just expressing myself, I take joy.

**M: How much attention you pay to clothing?**

Mah: I do pay attention, to be honest. A lot. This evening I will be already thinking what to wear next week. The accesories, I minimized my accessories now but I still love it. To me it is a lot of fun, this creative side of me.

**M: And how much attention you pay to clothing on other people?**

Mah: I do observe clothing on other people. Whatever catches my eye. Interesting colors, combinations, whatever inspires me. The way this person is carrying themselves. So I look at the preson, ath their clothing, how are they carrying themselves. It is a nice thing to watch, I take inspiration.

**M: Do you like the clothing style in Czech republic?**

Mah: It is totally different of course. And I feel like these days people are getting more and more aware of what to wear. As back home, as here, I do not like when somoene who strictly follows the fashion. So I take joy when there is someone who explores their creative side with the help of clothing and maybe wears something different and interesting, so that really inspires me.

**M: Is there any particular way of clothing that you can really make a statement with?**

Mah: In the winter I do feel cold and I do not care that much. But summer is my time to spread my wings. I like wearing skirts for example, longer than short, colors than less colors. But lately I discovered I also like black and white haha. I do like to accesorise myself, necklace, but usually with necklace it has some kind of meaning for me, not always. I like my necklaces because I brought them from Pakistan. So I think I do a combination between east and west a little. Now I dress more simply than before, but not loosing the fun part. I try to keep myself comfortable, but still to bring joy and make me feel good.

**M: So would you say the accessories are helping to express yourself more?**

Mah: It is organic, it changes everytime. So two years ago it was really part of me, it is still during the summer especially. But now, it is getting less and less, all day having a necklace in work, it can be too much. It depends on my mood as well. Sometimes I want to express myself, sometimes I dont care.

**M: Now something about veil specifically, what does it mean to you?**

Mah: Thinking about it from my personal experience. If I am talking about my clothing and the way I used to wear. Again yeah there are two sides, if it is just the islamic veil or the scarf. I will show you..so this is the typical Pakistani scarf. So it means you have a bigger piece of cloth. A typical women in Pakistan would wear that. It is covering your head. Of course it comes from religion, but now it is more cultural. So now you can see, my hair is down, it is not completely covered, it could be even shorter. You can really play with it. This for me is the cultural thing. When I go back it is part of the cultural dresscode, if you want to fit in, you have to wear. For example my city. If we talk about Islamic veil, it means the protocol is you have to cover your hairline and your neck. Two definitions is, one you can go deeper, other is you covering your chin, your jaw line. For me it was part of my spiritual journey, in my family we wear just the cultural one. So for me it was part of discovering myself.

**M: At which age you started wearing it?**

Mah: I think I was 20..or later..22..somewhere around that time. I was already working, studying my Masters degree. And then I carried on for couple of years.

**M: So it was part of your spiritual journey?**

Mah: Yes and understanding myself and bigger things in life.

**M: So at the time you started to wear it, how did it make you feel?**

Mah: Ok, maybe because I was...if you wear it in my city, because you already have this cultural dresscode that already covers your head and everything, it gives you the strength. And when I started to wear the Islamic way, it was more a way to show I practice my religion. People expected me to be more religious. Those who wear scarf, the expectations for them raise. People start thinking: You better be a better person.

**M: So the community starts noticing you?**

Mah: Yes and the expectation raises. This is what i I felt.

**M: What kind of expectations?**

Mah: To be a better person..or better religious person.

**M: What does it mean?**

Mah: That you have to practice more. So for example if I miss the prayer..people would be like: Ohh you missed your prayer, what is the veil for? Or if I dont fast, or miss one or two days. So there is more expectations.

**M: Have you ever faced any struggles because of your choice to veil or not to veil?**

Mah: So there was a big struggle within me. Not in a society, really, because my family doesnt wear, just my sister. So they knew I was experimenting. So maybe my mom was like why are you not wearing it, it is a good thing to wear. So the expectations from my mom, so there was little bit expectations from people. They were asking why are you leaving it. So there was this, from my side it was because it was a journey. So it was confusion, on a different level. What value does it bring to my life.

**M: Now a totally different thing. Your on-line activity. How much time do you spend on social media?**

Mah: So I think my phone really knows haha. Of course, busy days less. The day starts with social media, the bathroom time hahah. Instagram, little bit of Facebook. Sometimes 5 mins then back to work, sometimes 10 minutes, sometimes an hour. It really varies. I do not have any routine. Usually in the evening, when I get back home, oh this is interesting, I will watch this cat video haha.

**M: Which apps do you use?**

Mah: So recently I got really hooked on Instagram, the stories. I do not why I watch it, but I do. Then the Facebook, I have news there, so basically just to know what is happening in the world. So now I prioritize on Facebook what to see, so I have less prioroties on friends haha and more on the news, because I just want to see the news there, so I start with that, and little bit of people who are important in my life. And maybe some interesting event In the city.

**M: What is the purpose of you using these apps?**

Mah: Instagram no purpose haha, it is not even fun after 15 minutes, it just addiction..thats reality. The fun is already gone, I am just scrolling my finger. It is hard to accept, but it is true to myself. And Facebook is for news, czech news, international, cat news hahaha.

**M: Are you part of any groups on Facebook concerning politics, culture, religion? Or a fan page?**

Mah: Not really..Game of thrones haha. Well I come from a tribal family, so I want to see other tribes around the world, how is their life. I have feelings for different tribes.

**M: So there are groups?**

Mah: There is a page, not really a group. African, American, Australian...tribal life.

**M: Do you often discuss these topics of politics, culture and religion in online space?**

Mah: No I dont. I get very scared because of the comments, people are really attacking each other. So even when there is a point that speaks to me, this is this way right, I would not express. Because of the cyberbullying, it gets really dirty. I would probably share if I find something interesting. Lately I just started to share privately actually, just to my friends if I find something interesting.

**M: Have you ever got into an arguement online?**

Mah: Yes, it happened once or twice.

**M: What was it concerning?**

Mah: It was about for example, there are these bleech creams, you know right, from China and it is huge in my country as well so on. And I hate them, because they wants you to feel insecure about your skin color. And I think I posted few times that it promotes insecurities in people, just accept your skin color. So there was one company from Czech republic trying to sell it and they were trying to sell them in India, and were doing some survey. And I said this is wrong, dont do it, it promotes insecurity among people that stays with them forever. And another side was: why do you want to teach what is right or wrong? Let people choose what they want to buy, there is freedom. Which I understand yes. But there are certaint things that are wrong on a very basic level. Just selling some thing for your profit and not really giving a shit about the other person. So yes, I got to this arguement. On that page.

**M: On the other hand, was social media of any help to you? Especially when moving here?**

Mah: Yes sure, it was a big help. When I actively started using Facebook in 2009, 2010. It was a big help because of several reasons. I started to stay in touch with friends. There are groups of foreigners in Czech republic, I became part of. To see life of other foreigners in the Czech republic, to see life of Czech people here. So I started meeting people from these groups in real life as well from these groups. At the begining I also joined some groups like Muslims in Czech republic, because of course I come from that background. How is their life here? Women were asking where to buy scarf or a veil etc. Usually suggesting to buy a regular scarf and wear it this or that way and so on. I was not very active there.

**M: So you established intercultural contact using these apps?**

Mah: Yes, sure.

**M: Do you follow any content about veiling?**

Mah: Not really, but if I see something by accident, I get excited, for example in the hijab fashion and some interesting combination of clothes. It intrigues me.

**M: How do you feel your culture is represented in the media in this country?**

Mah: My culture is definitely represented in a very bad light unfortunately in the Czech republic. But not completely bad, on the other hand there are some interesting touristic programs, so that is like at least some other sides. So I think it is just very black and white. They just choose to show the dark sides more, it doesnt mean they are not there. Of course there are dark sides in every society. And unfortunately my culture, my society, my country, there are many bad things happening and these are the things that catch attention and it is repeated so many times, that it is imprinted in peoples minds. And it is almost impossible to change that.

**M: Do you feel like this can have any affect on your life? Like people can view you differently?**

Mah: Yeah because this is usually how the conversation..well not usually..but people are like: How is life in Pakistan? Is it that bad, that dangerous? Well it can be..people live their normal life but then shit happens. They

have their regular life like here, to make money, send children to school, have a house, have a good relationship, just basic human things, have good health, so everybody is just trying to do that. And then some shit happens. And then I see myself explaining that people have also normal life, but that doesn't mean I am denying the bad things that also happen. Just I want people to see it on the deeper level, not just the superficial.

**M: Do you feel the overall portrayal of the media can have the power to change the negotiation of veiling behavior ?**

Mah: Yeah sure because it is the same..for example. If something goes wrong in the Muslim country and it is shown several times in the media, so whenever word Muslim comes up, some crazy shithead person has done something wrong in the world, and I don't want that to happen here, I am scared to talk to them...so now so many times things are repeated and shown in the media, so you automatically start to believe it. And it is not just that I am imagining it, I know some people, one of my acquaintances used to say this: ohhh I saw these women in scarfs and I was so scared you know..and I asked: What were they doing? And she said: oh they were just shopping. What is the point of getting scared? Women shopping just dressing differently than you. She travels a lot but she has never been in a Muslim country, maybe just Turkey on the beach, so not really experiencing the country. So that's the thing, this is unfortunately how it is portrayed in the media. That Muslims do shit and everybody gets scared. These people wear these kind of clothes so stay away.

**M: So you think it can affect for example young girls not to wear the veil?**

Mah: Yes, sure. Look at myself, when I first got here. I was 26,27 so..I can imagine girls who go to school, universities..maybe universities, you already start to find your own strength. But school can be very hard!

**M: So for me that is all, it was really in-depth. If you have anything more that you would like to add or any questions?**

Mah: Yeah I was not expecting that, it was really good. I would just like people to know the different aspects of wearing clothes, different ..I was just like thinking the other day, why we wear what we wear right now in Europe? We have also went through different evolution. If you see women hundred years ago in Czech, they also used to wear longer skirts, covering their legs more, headscarves.

**M: Yes I remember my grandma used to wear headscarf.**

Mah: Yes it was an evolution, then women starting to join workforce and then there was communism that happened, so religion all together was out of the picture. So you already lost that relationship to religious clothing elements. And this is how ...then trying to add fashion and all that.

M:

Mah: I feel like this is what bonds us everywhere, to find the balance between those two things. Like your own goals in life, but also the peace. And to find a deeper meaning in life.

#### **4. Yasmine**

**Duration:** 1:09:40

Y: Thank you for doing the research.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

Y: Well, I am Yasmine. I am 26 years old. I study life coaching and psychology and motivating people. I am from the Netherlands. I live in Amsterdam with my parents and my Brother.

**M: Where you born in Netherlands?**

Y: Yes, I was born in Amsterdam, I am a real Amsterdamer haha.

**M: And your parents come from Morroco right?**

Y: Yes, they were born in Morrocco and then they moved to Netherlands. To work actually, to get work opportunities, to also make beautiful future for their children.

**M: How did you spend your weekend?**

Y: What I do mostly..because I am married..my husband studies in another city and I still live with my parents because to get a house in here is really complicated, very huge problém in Amsterdam. It is very hard to get a house, you have to wait like 14,15 years or you have to be very well paid job to rent a house or buy a house. So normally, I spend weekends with my husband. We go to the city, we hang out in a park, or new cafes or we are with family. We are just trying to find activities to spend time together.

**M: How do you usually spend your day?**

Y: I wake up...because my parents are also sick, little bit health problems, so I also clean the house, I do the chores, like grocery shopping and I have my breakfast and work for school stuff and then ..I am bored. Because I am alone most of the time, so I go to the library and read a book and do a research. Sometimes I have appointments. So it depends how busy the day actually is, so mostly I clean the house and the library. Sometimes I have a client so I help the client to achieve their goals.

**M: What would you say your core values are?**

Y: I value my patience. And I value.. sometimes ..everybody has their ups and downs and I value that I try to keep everyone positive. So we can survive actually ..because we have lot of characters that are kind of taking over..so that. And what else? Just the positivity and patience.

**M: Now about your environment. Where do you usually spend most of your time?**

Y: School, library, school cafes where I feel really happy. Like really happy actually. Because I am freelancer, self-employed.

**M: Where do you feel the most comfortable?**

Y: If I am with the people that I love...and when it is very like cozy. I like to be in cozy environment. I like to talk and be free and not judgemental.

**M: Where do you feel the least comfortable?**

Y: Around judgemental people and people who do not accept me or my religion.

**M: And did it ever happen to you, to be in such situation?**

Y: Emm..yeah. Maybe it was brought with us when we were little in our upbringing. Like we were different and we need to stay close to our culture, our identity. We struggle with two cultures you know. We are Morroccan but we are also Dutch you know, we have two legs and one is in the water and other on the ground. It is like identity crisis. With me, I am just a human being you know. I dont put labels on myself and I do as I feel. I want to feel free...but people around me are like: Oh you are Morrocan. Or you Muslim. I cant hang out with you, you cant go to the bar or to a cafe. Or hangout with people that drink. And that makes me uncomfortable and sad. Im just me.

**M: So the fact that they prejudice you because they think you cannot go to the bar for example?**

Y: Yeah. I have my own choices, my own principles, my own way of thinking. I see people who judge you, because you are Muslim. Meanwhile you are a human being with your own decisions. Everybody has their own way of living.

**M: What is your family like?**

Y: I have mom and dad, I have sister with a handicap, motorical handicap, I have a little Brother, he is not little actually haha, 22 years old. The relationship with my sister is very close, at first we werent really close, because of her handicap my parents gave a lot of attention to her so I felt as neglected child and my Brother is a guy right so he got all the advantages but as I got older I got great relationship with my sister, I feel like I cant go a day without talking to her. With my Brother I call it bipolar relationship haha, sometimes we hate each other and sometimes we love each other. Because I am really free and not strict, I feel like sometimes we clash with my family actually. But my sister is the best. With my mom is the best, with my dad it improved.

**M: What do you value in them?**

Y: Emm...I value the love that they have. They feel lot of love towards everybody in this house but they dont know how to express it sometimes. What I learnt in psychology is everyone express in their own way like some people do it with agressivness. Some without saying anything. ..Yea so I would say I value the love that they have for us.

**M: What about your friends?**

Y: It is a bit of odd subject for me because I lost lot of friends because they moved abroad and do not live here anymore and I had a friend here but I feel like they dont accept me so much for who I am, things I like to do...like for example I like art, drawing, dancing..and they are like eww I dont want to do that. Or when I buy vintage shoes or something like that they arae like wtf are you buying. There are stereotypes of morrocan girls and she is one of them...like only gucci stuff, expensive stuff. So because of that I didnt feel like going with the relationship further because they judge me, so I have a really small group, like one friend, my husband, my sister...all other guys are around the world now.

**M: What do you value in a friend?**

Y: That they accept you for who you are, your religion, your culture. I value people who love you for who you are.

**M: Is there a behavior you wouldnt stand in a friend?**

Y: When they dont listen...and feel entitled. Like when you hang out and only them talk lalala. Hii I am still here, arent you interested in my well-being as well? Im being very honest. I feel like honesty is the key.

**M: Who do you usually spend most of your time with?**

Y: With my husband or my sister. Then with one friend but she recently moved to Los Angeles.

**M: If you can tell me a littlbe bit about the traditions you practice, religious and cultural?**

Y: Cultural I do not do here, but when I am in Morroco, my grandma always goes to a place where they put henna on her hands. Like when she is happy, she puts henna. Its kind of a tradition they have for women. When you clean yourself, you put body art on yourself. To be honest I dont know any other morrocan traditions. We do not practice it. For religion, when it is Rammadan, we clean the house, we also prepare food, we do some classical music, we decore. We prepare chebakia (sweets made of honey and sesame).

**M: So do you fast during ramadan?**

Y: I havent fast for the past five years because I have hypoglycemia, low blood sugar. But I want to try this year. In our religion if you are sick or if it harms your body, you are not allowed to fast but you can do other things.

**M: And your family fasts?**

Y: My mom doesnt fast because she has diabetes, my dad does fast, my Brother too and my sister tries. And my husband and his family too.

**M: What about other traditions. Do you pray?**

Y: I try to pray, I try to put prayers in my day. Sometimes I dont, sometimes it is hard. They say you better pray. Women are not obligated to go to mosque, men are obligated. To do the Friday prayer there. Like Jews have Saturday, Christians have Sunday. So women have their choice like taking care of children, of their parents, like old traditional way.

**M: But you try to pray during your day sometimes?**

Y: Yeah like life is very hectic but I try. But I cant pray in the middle of the class if its time to pray. If I pray I try to build up everything during the day and pray at night for the whole day that I missed. It is like 2 or 5 minutes per prayer, so then I have more.

**M: Now I will ask about the clothing. What does clothing mean to you?**

Y: For me clothing is the way of self-expression. How I feel, How I want to feel. So if I want to be a badass I wear a leather jacket or jeans haha. I am not that strict. Wear what you like and what makes you comfortable even though fashion is not always comfortable.

**M: How much attention you pay to the clothing?**

Y: For now if I am in a hurry I dont pay that much attention. But if I go to a party or wedding or dinner, I take like an hour. But my hair is more important than my clothes haha.

**M: How much attention you pay to the clothing of other people?**

Y: I like watching them, what they wear. I dont put that much attention to it but if I see someone wearing something cool, it is inspirational. Maybe on the internet, on instagrami Scroll sometimes and see trends and fashionable girls. Then I maybe half hour and hour to Scroll and see.

**M: Do you feel like there is any particular way of clothing that you can make a statement with?**

Y: I feel like with my emotions. When I am mad I feel like wearing black, when I am happy I feel like wearing cute stuff and when I am lazy it is just whatever, leave me alone haha. It is a hard question actually...I just go with a flow. If I wore a hijab it would be different, I would cover my breasts, my hips, I would put more attention to it. But now I just wear whatever I like, I dont put attention to this stuff. But when I go to my parents in law I do put a bit more covered clothes..because they are very judgemental, my mother in law does wear the hijab. I had like a conflict with that one time. I had a miniskirt little above my knees, it was highwasted, with a sweater and it was cute, it was not that you could see my ass or anything. I thought I would be myself and go there and they need to accept me for who I am and they gave me bad faces and stuff. Made me feel really uncomfortable, made me think about the life haha. Like why dont people accept you for who you are. They judge a lot. Why do they want you to wear a hijab and cover and blabla, because you are married for example or because you got your period for example. So thats the thing. I dress in different type of occassions, to protect myself from judgement.

**M: Was there a conflict or just bad looks?**

Y: First time I just got bad looks and they didnt tell anything to me. And second time it was after ramadan, it was a party, a religious party, they call it sugar party. And I wore a dress, just above my knees and I looked good, even my husband said you look good. I felt happy and confident and when I came to their home they were like: oh you are wearing provocative dress. That people will give you bad eye...you are not covering your beauty.

Who are you to judge me. I am allowed to wear whatever I want. You are a man and you can keep your desires. And then the other day I wore a morrocand dress and it was long, little big for me but I liked it, I put a belt and it

was cool. And this time I was covered and I went there. And this time he was like oh now you wearing thats too big for you, you cant wear that. So they judge me for wearing short stuff, then large stuff. So its never right in peoples eyes.

**M: One additional question for religon. You were born to muslim family, so you were automatically Muslim. Or did you have a time when you questioned your religion?**

Y: Mmmm. I did sometimes question the religion because I didnt get educated. The attention to understand. And every time I tried to search for answers...because in Islam we are stimulated to ask questions, it is good for us to ask questions. And I didnt got my answers, I got rejected everytime. So I questioned everything, I questioned life, I questioned religion. So then I said to myself: I wont do anything that will make me feel bad, I will do what makes me happy. So if religion can fill that up, I will walk towards that. ...Can you repeat the question again?

**M: If you had time when you questioned the religion.**

Y: Yeah, I never felt it wasnt right for me. But I felt the pressure to wear hijab, not in my family but with other people. And I was born into religion. But it was again more like identity crisis, because I am part Dutch, part Morrocan, part Islam. And people mix culture and religion together while it is two different things, you know. So people use culture and religion in their advantage to make themselves look good, to control you. So in my mind I separate myself from the religion, and from that point I tried to build myself up again. I started from zero to now when I am. But when I was little I went to the Mosque, I learnt Quran, I learnt to write Arabic. But when you are little you just need to accept what they give you know. But when you grow older you are like ok but is this all right, why is this like this or that. So I questioned myself and made a little distance from it. And I try to educate myself more and compare to other religions, but I feel like I am a Muslim in my own way.

**M: So what would you say are the good things for you from this religion?**

Y: Islam itself...you are not alone when you are practicing. And I associate religion with kindness and love and so on. I dont associate religion with hate, which you can see on social media, politics and so on. Mmm...can you repeat the question?

**M: What would you say the good things from the religion are for you?**

Y: Discipline, structure, self-respect, respect to others, good manners, helping poor people, being kind to people. When I read the Quran it is amazing what you read there, about stuff that happened in past..so knowledge. My religion gives knowledge...everything that is right. And what it gives me in my interpretation.

**M: What does the veil mean to you?**

Y: For me it represents protection and some kind of holiness statement. And a way of living actually. I read something about the veil I wanted to share with you. My dad told me it isnt the must to wear a hijab but it is a must to cover your chest and butt to protect yourself from the desire of men, thats how he said it. Lot of people are having discussions about it and lot of people misinterpreted the word hijab. The word hijab is not the scarf on your head, it is chimar the other word. There is a discussion. And I feel like if you practice the religion in the right way, you do it right. And if you practice it in submisivness or controlling other people, it is not the right way. And wearing hijab is your own will, if you want to wear it on your head, you wear it on your head, if you do it another way like wearing long sleeves or covering that is also hijab. There was just a group of people that made it like a head scarf. In a quran you cant find a sentence where God is saying like yeah hijab is on your head, wear it on your head. Like this part says: tell the believer women to put their eyes down and control their passion, they will not disguise anything of their body except for what is needed.



They will cover with their chimar, except in a company of their spouses, their fathers, their sons, their brothers, other women.... It is also in a way, you have to move certain way, you have to be gracious. The way you move, the way you wear things. To help other people from their own desires.

**M: So...do you feel the veil is more part of religion or culture?**

Y: The veil is part of religion but in different way. Like the headscarf, idont know if it is culture. If you think about it, people in the Sahara, the nomads, the men wear the hijab right, the scarf on their head, not the women. It depends on how you express the word actually.

**M: Have you ever faced any struggles because of your decision not to veil?**

Y: I did have struggles being in company of other women who wore it. They were like yeah you a Muslim, why dont you wear it. Then I said I am not ready to wear it in a way you are wearing it and I am covering myself in my own way. I always say Hijab and chimar are just general way of coverage and I do it in my own way. If you choose to do it in your way, do it, if you choose in any other ways do it, I respect that. And I also have seen it with other people, wearing hijab while doing sports, like boxing. So she gets the question like oh you are boxing but you wear a hijab, do you have problems or trouble doing that. Some people say no. Some people just dont do what they like. So she had troubles with that. Or going for a job interview. They dont take you as an employee: you are not good for envision of our company. Like those things happen. So sometimes when I go to a job interview they ask me, why arent you wearing a veil, you a Muslim and you are a woman. Then I give them the same answer: I cover myself in my own kind of way. So they judge you not wearing it and they judge you wearing it.

**M: Do you feel like it might be an option for you in the future?**

Y: I dont feel like wearing it. I feel like I will be looked at a different way. Because lot of women that are wearing it and are a Muslim they are like fighting for their rights, for education and for their freedom. They make them feel dumb, like they are just housewife material and stay at home. Whereas in our religion the women have more rights than the man and because of that I feel like it is kind of jealousy. So everyone tries to oprress women for wearing a scarf on their head and anything like that. Becase I had some neighbors who had to wear it because of strict religious dads. Who think they know everything. And I see them in the elevator now that they are changing their clothes and putting the scarf down on their way to work. I saw it a lot of times and it makes me sad. So I dont feel like wearing the scarf in that way. To put it on my head and just go outside-no but if I have to pray I will do it, because those are the restriction.

**M: Now the on-line activty. Can you estimate how much time you spend on social media per day?**

Y: When I wake up, an hour. And sometimes middle of the day to see what everyone is doing in the city, so half hour and before sleeping maybe two hours, three hours. You just watch funny things and share.

**M: Which apps do you use the most?**

Y: Pinterest, youtube a lot of youtube, instagram. I think those three the most. I dont post anything.

**M: What is the reason of you using these apps?**

Y: I actually use it for everything like internet design, psychology, fashion, artist that I follow and my friends. I want to stay connected with everyone. I want to see beyond my eyes of what I live. I mean the soul can travel through social media. And you are like a sponge haha. It is addictive. I admire people doing things and when I see them on social media I admire that and gives me more energy to do things myself, to gain more knowledge and learn things. Curiosity actually.

**M: Are you part of any fan groups that have religious, culture, political content?**

Y: Yeah there is a guy (arabic name) and he is a scholar for religion and he explains like little verses and different things of religion with humor, so when you watch it you are laughing. You can be loose and laugh. It makes me wanna learn more about the religion actually in a good way and I follow him.

**M: And any political?**

Y: I dont follow political things much, it makes me feel bad haha. Also I do not watch Tv much, I try to make a little bubble. I know things are happening but dont want it to affect me that much. Because I feel powerless to do anything. I try to create positive environment, if I create something positive than it counts.

**M: Do you often discuss these topics online?**

Y: I dont have anyone to discuss it with. If I try to discuss it online the political parts of religion, people dont wanna talk about it, because there is a lot of ignorance. I would love to...and I am always afraid to say the things in a wrong way. You have to be careful because it can create lot of problems.

**M: Would you say the social media was of any help for you?**

Y: Yes. It made me see things, products. I also found some interesting scarfs I shared with someone, like my sister for example. I feel like if I find something that would be of any help to others, I would share. But yeah...I mean it is another world, another dimension. That dimension is fun. It helps me in that way.

**M: Have you ever faced any struggles in on-line world?**

Y: There is miscommunication. When you dm someone in social media, people can interpret it in their own way. Yesterday I was helping my sister to paint a house and I recorded my husband that he was painting and everybody knows we do not have a house yet. So people were reacting like oh you have a house finally haha. So it was miscommunication haha. So you can put anything on the internet and project something that you are not.

**M: Were there are any even conflicts or big struggles?**

Y: Yeah when I got engaged with Younis I put it on social media and his mom got angry. Why are you putting it on social media?! People are gonna give you the bad eye, energy will be bad. We still didnt have the wedding party, we chose not to, we just want to do a small thing and travel. And his mom was like no you cant do that. Why did you put it on social media. And one time with my old job I posted something, that people that were working with me they put knives in my back and I got in trouble. For one general quotation I didnt put any names. So I have to be careful. Especially when you are Muslim or Moroccan and go on a vacation and you pose in a bikini you get judged. Or when you are having a cup of redbull and everyone says you are having beer. People will say oh you are so far away from your religion. Or you dont wear a scarf, you are so far away from your religion..I had that too. So yeah social media can be shitty and also fun haha.

**M: Do you follow any content about veiling?**

Y: Yeah there was a youtuber that I followed but it has been a long time. She and other one. Her name is Dina Tokio, she is based in London. She is half british, half egyptian. And she was wearing a scarf. Her mom is English and she was also wearing a scarf and she was doing a hijab fashion in very modern way. Very free. And I admired her for all the effort she put into showing young women they can wear the hijab in a way that can be fashionable. Trying to use her power to fill the hole in the market, acknowledge that we also love fashion, the muslim community with hijab. So I was following her for that. She also showed how she was handling her marriage in Islam, and we are not educated in that way. We only see the negative side. But at the end she took her scarf off and the Muslim community made it very hard for her. She lost lot of followers. You should check

that, I will send you. You will see that even your own community will judge you. It is never right. What I have learnt is, stay close to yourself.

**M: How do you feel your culture is represented in Netherlands?**

Y: Like music part as an example, very positive. People love morrocan music. There is also a culture that was born in Amsterdam and they use morrocan slang. People are more attracted to Arabic and Moroccan music now. But in negative way, it is still about the scarf, criminal activities. When something happens, they will say it is a Moroccan guy, but when a Dutch guy does the same, they wont show him. They will say he has mental illness or so.

**M: How do you feel the religion is represented in the Netherlands?**

Y: Very strict. Extreme. They present us as very extreme, religious people. With the black scarf. I always say it looks like a ghost haha. I saw it one time in my life when I was little and there was a woman in a white long scarf and I actually ran away because I thought it was a ghost hahaha. I understand people are scared of that. I do not know what is underneath. I dontknow..there was a guy, english man I think. And he couldnt be himself so he had to leave the land and he left it wearing this, the long black scarf. To look like a woman. He flew the land in that way. So you cannot know it is a woman or a man. So I do understand people saying this like that, the security and so on.

**M: Very last question. Do you feel the media have the power to change the negotiation of your veiling behavior?**

Y: At the end I will chose it myself. But media have a big role. So if they put lot of positive things about the veil, people would feel positive about it. If they put negative, people feel negative. Input, output you know. If media can help in a positive way, it would be nice.

## **5. Ratna**

**Duration: 51:47**

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

R: My name is Ratna, I am 28, going 29. After I finished my Master last year, Erasmus, I went back to Indonesia, Jakarta. I live here. I am an employee in one of the government institutions, working as an economist. I work 9 to 5 like everybody.

**M: How long did you live in the Netherlands, in Rotterdam?**

R: For one year and half. It is a year program but I prolonged.

**M: So you went to the same university, the Erasmus one?**

R: Yes.

**M: How did you like Netherlands?**

R: I love Netherlands, I miss the weather (laugh). I like cold weather rather than hot. It is really hot here in Indonesia, have you been here?

**M: Not yet, I was only in Taiwan for three months but that was already too hot for me (laugh).**

R: I went to Prague in winter 2016 actually.

**M: Really? How did you like it?**

R: When I was there it was the Christmas, it is very cold. But it was beautiful.

**M: Did you live in another city in Europe?**

R: Just Rotterdam.

**M: How did you spend your weekend?**

R: Read a book, stay at home. I usually spend my weekend at home, watch a movie, going out with my friends.

**M: How do you usually spend your day?**

R: I usually wake up really early and start my day with praying because in my religion. So I start my day quite early, I wake up at 4. Because there is ... I have to pray... We have to pray five times a day. And the first prayer is quite early. At 4:30 or something. But after that I go to sleep again (laughter). But after that I usually wake up at 7:30, have breakfast and go to the office. And I go home around 6, I work out usually. Have a little gym or something before I go home. Once or twice a week I usually go to Islamic lecture...yeah thats all.

**M: So where do you usually spend most of your time?**

R: Probably work. At my room, I really like reading. I also like work out, doing yoga, pilates. One or two hours not every day actually but three times every week. It makes me feel better. Also after I finish my study I also often go to the religion lecture. I also like to watch the lecture from Youtube, just to enhance my knowledge about anything.

**M: Where do you feel the most comfortable?**

R: At my room. Usually when I have lot of time to read or just watch Youtube.

**M: Where do you feel the least comfortable?**

R: I rarely feel less comfortable. I dont really like being in the crowd. Maybe I am more comfortable in my own space, in my home. Or with my college or with my friends. I dont really like when we go to the market or something, it gives me headache.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about your family?**

R: Ok...it is a small family. Only my parents, me and my Brother. And we have three cats. I consider them as my family as well. My family is quite religious. We have really strong cultural..we are from one of the tribe in Indonesia. We have quite strong cultural and religion background. We apply them in our daily life. I am mostly closer to my mom. Not so close to my Brother, we have lot of arguements.

**M: What do you value in them?**

R: Hmm...I respect my parents, of course we argue a lot in the past. But now our relationship is more chill...we can talk about almost everything. Mmm I am not really close with my Brother, because we argue a lot, but it is fine, we are fine.

**M: What about your friends?**

R: My closest friends are from my highschool, because I feel like they are good friends. They also share positive vibes with me. They support me a lot, we support each other. Because most of them are quite succesful in their fields, we can help each other. And also besides they are smart, they also have like quite strong religious background...and thats support. If your friends support you with a positive attitude and it is based on religion, it makes you feel more comfortable sometimes.

**M: Is there a type of behavior you wouldnt stand in a friend?**

R: I dont like bullying. I do bully sometimes but just with fun and respect. I dont like bullying, I dont like friends who are really pushy.

**M: And is it because in the past you had experience with that?**

R: I didnt have any experience with that myself. But I dont like seeing my friends bullied. Because it is like showing you are more superior than others..I really hate that..it is really negative.

**M: Now something more about your traditions. Can you tell me which religious and cultural traditions you practice?**

R: In terms of cultural..I said earlier I have a strong cultural background but actually I was born in Jaffa. My parents grew up there. They are influenced by these traditions. But not with me, I was born in the capital city. So the cultural thing is not so strong in my environment. But we dont practice anything in daily live. Maybe the strongest cultural thing that still lives with me is the food (laughter). But not any traditions that we would do in daily live. But in terms of religion, because in Islam. Islam is quite complicated religion. We have to pray five times a day, it is the mandatory one. But we also have the side praying. Like reading the Quran and then other things like fasting as well. Like you know two times a week there is like a Sunna fasting, it is not mandatory, but if you do it, it is a plus for you. Also next week we have Ramadan, it is mandatory for us to fast for whole month. But not only fasting in the day but in the night we are also asked to pray more. We have like additional 11 prayers at night. Quite a lot. It is not a simple religion I have to say.

**M: Did you practice all these traditions when you were living in the Netherlands?**

R: Yeah I did. I consider myself quite religious. I always want to enhance my knowledge in terms of religion so I have strong reason why I have to do this and that. So I dont feel like I am pushing myself into doing all that.

**M: What does veil mean to you? What does it represent?**

R: So veiling for me is one way to obey what God command for us. It is not an option in Islam, it is not a yes or no question even though I started with veiling like 5 years ago. Actually I have to start to veil when I enter adulthood. It is a mandatory for Muslim women, actually. So it is my way to obey what is command for me.

**M: So you never questioned it?**

R: Yeah since I started to wear it I never opened it in public. In my family it is ok to open the hijab and when I am with my women friends. But never in public.

**M: Have you ever faced any struggles because of your decision to veil?**

R: Struggles..no..oh. I have experienced one thing when I went to one bar in Amsterdam. Everyone was like watching me. But I am not sure whether it was because I wear a veil and I look different than others or just like me, because I am an asian wearing a veil. I cant tell you why they were staring. But I was not comfortable having people watching me. But that is only one experience, I have never experienced anything like that anywhere else.

**M: Now about clothing in general. So what does clothing mean to you in general?**

R: I dont see my clothing as a communication way. I wear something that is comfortable for me. But specifically my hijab, it is mandatory. I like to dress well, dress good like any other woman. But I dont intend to communicate anything with my clothes.

**M: Can you estimate how much attention you pay to clothing?**

R: I try to be very simple in the morning. I dont spend too much time. Because I make my clothes very simple to make my day easier.

**M: How much attention you pay to clothing on other people?**

R: I dont usually pay attention to peoples clothing. So it is hard to tell.

**M: Do you think there is any particular way of clothing you can make a statement with?**

R: Not really. I am in Indonesia where most of people wear hijab as well, but I pay more attention to the occassion as well. For example if I attend a seminar or more formal, I decide to dress more formal, more nice. If

it is just with friends, I like to dress well I like to look pretty but I dont spend any particular time to dress. For me it is important to look well in front of other people, it is my way to respect everyone. Because you dont want to look ugly or for people to look at you with disrespect.

**M: Now something about the on-line activity. Can you estimate how much time do you spend on social media per day?**

R: Oh my god (laugh), I spend quite a lot of time on Instagram, hour and a half every day. But I dont post a lot, I just like to watch my friends activity on their feed. I am not really active on Facebook, only on Instagram or Twitter.

**M: So those are the apps you use the most?**

R: Instagram the most. Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn as well.

**M: What is the purpose of you using these apps?**

R: Sometimes I use those social media to post my thoughts on something, but not really often. Usually just my fun activities. I also like taking pictures so sometimes I use them with some things that I feel interesting.

**M: Are you part of any groups or follow any pages with religious/cultural or political content?**

R: Politics not. But religious yeah. As I said earlier since I am back home I started to learn more because now I have more free time, I started to learn more about my religion. And I met some friends who shared same interest with me and I was invited to a group that share knowledge as well or links of Youtube about religion. But is not really affiliation. It is just group sharing something. But I dont really spend myself in any particular organisation.

**M: Would you say social media was of any help to you? For example when moving to Rotterdam?**

R: Yeah. Because there were some of the groups, we help each other there in the groups. It was helpful a lot.

**M: On the other hand did you ever faced any struggles in the on-line world?**

R: Because this year is ...if I may tell you something, this election period is quite tough here in Indonesia. We are divided in two groups here, one group more religion and the other. And they fight a lot on social media. I dont really like to include myself to this argument. But I watch it, there is some of the arguments there. But I also watch some of my friends who use social media as a way to communicate their choice, their own view, their voice. And also I watch some of my friends attacking another group which is more extreme for them, even though I dont always agree with them, because for example if you are not that religious as the other group and you dont agree with the other groups opinion it doesnt mean you have a right to attack the other group, but it is not happening. I have never included in these arguments, but if my own whatsapp group happen to have like arguments I usually voice my thoughts, like passively. Because I dont feel like I have so much knowledge to argue. But if they argue too much, I usually just remind them. And I really had hoax...I tried my best to tell my friends and my relatives who believe in hoax, I try to convince them or tell them in my knowledge what I know that it is a hoax.

**M: Would you say you established intercultural contact using social media?**

R: Not really but I had activities with my friends from other cultures, like my Korean friends, to Exchange our foods (laughter). Also when I lived in Netherlands I lived with landlord and she was very kind to me and she invited me to some of the Netherlands cultural events, like Christmas, like their family breakfast. But not in the social media.

**M: Do you follow any content about veiling specifically?**

R: Right now I don't follow anything like that. But when I was starting to make that decision of veiling, I followed them, because I needed to convince myself, I didn't want to look bad or ugly you know and from social media I can convince me that I can look quite well with this hijab. But those who I followed it was less about religion but more about the look itself. You know there are a lot of models. I try to look at them, they can dress well, they can look well. So I tried to convince myself that I can dress well and look well as well. But I follow some such religious content.

**M: What is this content usually about?**

R: Like a lecture, or about Ayah in Quran, or the prophets saying, prophet wisdom. It is more about inside knowledge.

**M: Again about veiling specifically. Do you search for the content about it actively? Because in the beginning you told me it is mandatory for you to wear it. Did you search for this information?**

R: As far as I remember I didn't search for this information. But you know in Indonesia we are quite religious, I have quite religious environment. For example I have very religious parents and family and they all lectured me about why do I have to wear it. I didn't really intendedly were looking for any source to convince myself. I had quite a lot of exposure unintendedly. And yeah I convince myself in the end. Maybe because I have quite religious environment I think. I didn't look at that.

**M: How do you feel your religion is represented in the media internationally?**

R: Internationally of course I saw some of the media...attacking. Maybe attacking is some extreme words. But at the same time I also feel very welcomed. When I was in the Netherlands I have never felt judged. Moreover. Some of my friends asked me why I am wearing this hijab, why do you need to wear it. Why do you need to pray five times a day when you need to study when it is almost exam. But they ask me with curiosity not like judging, the tone is different. And when I shared what my thoughts are, they can accept me and I feel calm. So...but internationally for example after the bomb in the Christchurch. I felt like the international feeling for Muslims is quite Ok, they respect us, they support us. So I don't feel like everyone is hating Muslim or everyone is attacking Muslim. I can feel the love as well. So I think people can understand which one is true, which one is not true. Yeah but I can't deny that some of the media still picture Islam as extreme religion but at the same time I feel like not all of the people is as stupid and they can digest what is true and what is not.

**M: Ok I have a very last question. Do you feel like the overall portrayal from the media can change the way young Muslim women negotiate their veiling behavior?**

R: I think again it is for the individual's reasons. If they feel like it is a mandatory, it is necessary to obey the commands of God, they will not be afraid. It is back to individual again. If they feel strong, they know it is God command. But for example when I was about to go to the Netherlands to do my Master, my dad told me to be more modest with wearing my hijab, because he is also afraid that people in the Netherlands are not really welcome of people in hijab. It means that my father feels the anxiety. But for me myself I don't think it affects me, but maybe for some people maybe.

**M: Ok thank you so much for your time. If you have any additional questions, let me know.**

## **6. Amira**

**Duration: 1:01**

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself (age, profession, background)?**

A: My name is Amira, 31 years old, I am a software engineer. I am originally from Egypt, and moved in May 2018 to Prague due to my husband's work.

**M: Where are you from and where do you live now?**

A: From Aswan, Egypt. Now I am living in Czech Republic.

**M: How did you spend your weekend?**

A: I spent last weekend studying online, cooking and watching movies.

**M: How do you usually spend your day?**

A: Studying, watching movies, cooking, and searching for jobs, because I recently got my residence permit.

**M: What would you say your core values are in yourself?**

A: I believe that I should develop myself and my personality constantly and should do my best to be a better one.

**M: Where do you usually spend most of your time?**

A: At home.

**M: Where do you feel the most comfortable?/ It can be a place but also a situation?**

A: Between mountains, on the sea, generally in nature and quiet places. With my family.

**M: Where do you feel the least comfortable?/ It can be a place but also a situation?**

A: Places which are very crowded or situations when I should take important decisions.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about your family?**

A: My mother is 69 years old, she was a school manager till 2010. My father was a school manager too, he died in 2001. I have two sisters, the eldest one is 38 years old. She is a pharmacist. The other one is 34 years old. She is a master's degree student and a laboratory specialist.

**M: What do you value in them?**

A: I value in my father and my mother that they raised us up in a calm and kind environment, they never forced us to do anything. They used to tell us what is right and what is wrong and let us take the decision. I remember after 3 years of my father's death, I decided to let my mother alone and travel to Cairo to apply in Cairo University and live there, she was very sad and did not want to live alone but she let me decide and try...but finally the university decided that I can't apply there and that I should apply in my hometown university. I like the strong personality of my eldest sister and her sense of humor even in the worst situations, my other sister has a very kind heart and she always prefers other's benefit than her own benefit. I consider my eldest sister as my hero and my soul mate I love talking to her and listening to her advice and her point of view.

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about your friends?**

A: I have a lot of friends in Egypt, my best friend and me are friends since 2002 we were together at school, college and even when we worked we worked together. I have just a few friends here in Czechia as I moved here only 11 months ago...2 Egyptians, 1 Chinese and 1 Czech.

**M: What do you value in them?**

A: Each one of them has a unique personality, one of them I value her strength to face the problems. My Czech friend helps me a lot with the Czech language and with the differences between the culture here and in Egypt.

**M: Is there a type of behaviour you wouldn't stand in your friend?**

A: I love them as they are, all of us have flaws, but we select friends who we are ok with their flaws, so the most important thing for me that they should be honest and have a sense of humor. Any kind of dishonesty or lying I can't stand, and I can't stand a friend who is always sad or unsatisfied.

**M: Who do you usually spend most of your time with?**

A: My husband.

**M: Do you carry any traditions that you practice (religious and cultural)? Can you tell me which are the cultural and which the religious ones?**

A: For religious practice: My veil, I don't wear tight or sexy clothes in front of strange men, who is not from my family, praying every day, don't drink alcohol, don't eat pork. For cultural traditions I don't like to preserve anything that may conflict with Czech people, for example in Egypt it is ok for the loud speaking at night or to listen to music loudly and we also can visit each other after 8 pm. All of these things we can't do here. But for me, I still cook the Egyptian recipes.



**M: Can you elaborate more on what culture and religion mean to you? What is the difference between these two?**

A: The religious practice is anything God ordered us to do or not to do, but cultural traditions are something we used to see the society around us do. For me, I try to keep on the religious practice as much as I can, but for the cultural traditions If they are not suitable for me, I prefer to do what I want to do.

**M: What does clothing mean to you? Is it important?**

A: For my clothes yes it is important. Like other girls, I like pretty dresses and clothes, sexy and bright ones, I wear them inside my house in front of my husband. I can also wear them in front of my family, and in front of any other woman too as long as there is no other men who can see me. For others' clothing, I believe that it is their choice so they can wear whatever they want.

**M: Can you estimate how much attention you pay to clothing?**

A: I love dresses and shirts, colorful ones. I pay much attention here in the Czech Republic because I can't easily find the clothes which suit me and my veil and look nice at the same time.

**M: How important it is on others?**

A: I think as a Muslim girl living in Czechia and wearing a veil, it is important to look elegant and fashionable as much as I can, most of the people think that clothes reflect who you are and they judge you as a result of it.

**M: Is there any particular way of clothing that you think is really powerful and can send a message? Do you make a statement with your clothing?**

A: I don't think so, I wore a hijab because God ordered me to do so, but at the same time I love the way people change their minds after dealing with me. They discover that I am a normal person who doesn't carry a bomb in her bag (laughter).

**M: What does veil mean to you, what does it represent?**

A: It represents that I follow God's order to veil, I feel stronger and I feel the freedom while I keep doing what I want to do even if I live in non-Islamic country.

**M: Do you feel veiling is more part of your religion or your culture?**

A: My religion.

**M: Have you ever faced any struggles because of your choice to veil or not to veil?**

A: For me I took a couple of months to convince my mother with my decision to wear the hijab, my mother wore it when she was around 35 years old, and I decided to wear it when I was 15 years old, so she was afraid that I am still young or I will change my mind and take it off, but in the end I wore it and I never took it off. Here in the Czech Republic, I can't go to any swimming pool because of my veil and burkini. Some people in the streets (sometimes) look at me weirdly here in the Czech Republic but I don't care as long as they never did a hateful reaction or something against me.

**M: Can you estimate How much time do you spend on social media per day?**

A: Around 1 or 3 hours a day.

**M: Which apps do you use the most?**

A: Facebook , Youtube, Whatsapp, Messenger.

**M: What is the purpose of you using these apps?**

A: Facebook to know my friends' and family's news and events. Whatsapp and messenger to communicate with them. Youtube for entertainment and studying.

**M: Are you part of any fan-groups concerning culture or religion or politics?**

A: As a fan, no, I don't prefer to do so just sharing knowledge. I joined a group on Facebook for Egyptians in the Czech Republic to communicate with them and to benefit each other.

**M: Do you often discuss culture, politics, religion online?**

A: Not often, only when it is necessary, or when someone asks.

**M: Would you say social media was of any help to you? F.e. groups etc.**

A: Recently I closed my Facebook account again. I closed it for 2 years before and reopened it and recently I decided to reclose it. I am trying to not be addicted to Facebook. I used Facebook before I close it for 10 years, during all of this time It helped me a lot to communicate with my old friend who I couldn't find if there is no Facebook. Here in the Czech Republic, I used it to ask other Egyptian residents about anything I don't know.

**M: On the other hand did you ever face any struggles there?**

A: On the other hand, It consumes my day. Before I close my account I used to use Facebook for a lot of time and then I found that I didn't achieve any progress in my study because of it, so I decided to close it.

**M: Do you establish intercultural contact with other people using new media?**

A: Online or on media, no...But when I started to learn the Czech language I met a lot of people who are from different countries, has different religions, and different mother tongue languages. I made a friendship with a Chinese one.

**M: Do you follow any content about veiling (hijab fashion, etc.)? Do you search for the information about it?**

A: Yes, I follow veil fashion groups on Facebook, but all of them...the brands shops, are in Egypt so I just watch.

**M: How do you feel your culture is represented in the media in your country where you live now?**

A: Unfortunately, The media shows the veil as a symbol of ignorance and uneducated persons who can kill others.

**M:How do you feel your culture is represented in the media in internationally?**

A: The same previous answer (laughter).

**M: Does the overall portrayal from media have the power the change the way you negotiate your veiling behaviour?**

A: Yes, I think it makes it harder to insist to wear hijab. I have internal worry if the situation would become worse or the media fires up the general opinion against hijab, will I continue to wear it? I hope so, but I don't know what will be my choice at that time. Our religion gave us the freedom to choose to wear it or to take it off...if there is any threat against us without any blame, because the safety of women is more important than hijab itself. My Egyptian friend was grabbed by her hijab by a man here in the Czech Republic, so since that time she decided to wear a cap instead of hijab as a solution because she became afraid. For the young girls, the situation is more complicated. They have less experience how to deal with people and the opinions against them, any word can harm them especially from their friends. The harmful attitudes can be just a few words and they are usually fragile, so maybe they cant bear the difficulties and gave up more quickly and take it off.

**M: Did you ever face any struggles in online space just because of your appearance?**

A: No, I didn't have any hard time online or even in reality. Just one time the center where I was learning the Czech language posted my picture between my class attendants in the center Facebook page and the comments

were diverse, some said hateful words for immigrants and that they should not stay in the Czech Republic and others liked the idea of the diverse students in the center. For me, I didn't consider it as hateful speech for me, because I know that online speech is different than the reality speech. There are a lot of guys find it easy to speak badly behind their keyboards. I do care about the everyday situations between me and the Czech people which are fine and I find them kind and nice especially when they discover that I can speak a few words in Czech.

**M: Thank you so much. It was very helpful talking with you. Do you have any questions regarding the interview? If not, thank you so much for your time.**

## **7. Zeinab**

**Duration:** 1:12

**M: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

Z: I am Zeinab from Syria. I came to Czech Republic in 2012. I stayed here because of the war. In Syria I studied but didnt finish one semester. Here in Prague I studied Czech language for one year to prepare for exams to get to university. Now I study Economy at CZU.

**M: Do you like it so far?**

Z: Yes, I do. It was big problem at first because czech language is so different to arabic. But now it is good. Especially because I study something related to maths, which is universal.

**M: So do you like living in Czech so far?**

Z: Yes I think it is pretty good. In the begining I didnt have that much social life, not many friends. I did have some international, arabic friends. But didnt have much time to integrate to community because I had to study so much. But last time I had internship at Integration Centre Prague and worked there till the end of year. Last year really changed my life, I have many friends now and I am integrating to the community. Before I liked Prague, the city, but did not have any social life, now it is so much better.

**M: I am happy to hear that. Do you have any experience with other city in Czechia than Prague?**

Z: Not really. I visited few cities several times but not much.

**M: And some European city?**

Z: Just Dresden in Germany.

**M: Your Czech is really good I have to say. I admire that.**

Z: Thank you. But many times I am worried my Czech is not so good. And unfortunately my English is not so good either. My Czech is much better.

**M: How do you usually spend your day?**

Z: Either at school on lectures or at home. I live with my family. I do not have much time. I have a lot of school now, state exams, it is last year.

**M: How would you describe your life in Prague?**

Z: I still miss more social life. I do have friends now, I am happy, just I think about the future. I am really worried that I might not find work here in Prague. I know...I think that it will be difficult because I wear veil. Second thing is that I do not have the citizenship I have the long-term residence. I have heard some stories from friend who is Czech, convert to Islam. And she couldnt find work at all because she wears hijab. So I am worried

for my future, where I can work. I can work at NGO, they do not care about my appearance. But I think in my field where I study it will be hard.

**M: And you want to stay and work here?**

Z: I really like it here. And the situation in Syria is not clear. And the fact that I speak czech and my life here so I do not want to move elsewhere.

**M: Where do you spend most of your time?**

Z: I think at home. Because at school I dont have that many friends there. So I also study at home.

**M: Where do you feel the most comfortable?**

Z: In my country for sure, that is the best situation for me. But at the same time, here it is fine, I feel good. I do not want to change my life. And I do not want to move to another country, or Arabic country. Because around the world now the image about syrian people is not so good. So I have two options I think. Or maybe I can get visa in UAE because my Brother works there but I do not want to move there or elsewhere. But even if I come back to Syria, there is lot of things missing, like elektricity, water so on. Now I do not have to think about it here. It is hard to get there.

**M: So you live with your family here now?**

Z: Yes my mom and dad. And my sister and her family. And my Brother lives in UAE. And my other sister lives in Qatar.

**M: And your family is also happy here?**

Z: My sister is happy, her husband works here. My dad is not so happy I think, because he is older so he cannot learn the language, it is harder for him.

**M: Is he learning it somewhere?**

Z: Yes, but he forgets it quickly. When I worked at ICP I tried to teach easy things in Czech to my mom, like basic sentences. But my mom could not remember anything.

**M: I see, it can be really hard. What about your friends here?**

Z: I have best friends from work. They are from all around the work, Ukraine, Syria. They all are very nice. They helped me in my studies, when I had health troubles.

**M: Who do you spend most of your time with?**

Z: With my mom here. Because my sister works and has to take care of her family. So my mom does not have much friends here and someone to talk with.

**M: What about the traditions that you practice, the religious ones?**

Z: I am not from extremely religious family, like in the middle. I think there are some girls that are not veiling. But for me the hijab is really important for Muslim women, it is like identification that I am Muslim. That is my opinion. But in Quran there are some Ayahs that talk about hijabs but I think every community or family applies that as they want. There is nothing 100 % right. I think my hijab is good, I did not loose it even though I do not live in my community anymore. But it is different with tradition, culturaly. For example in Saudi Arabia, they veil even their faces. I think that is too extreme. I think that is more culture than religion. But I feel like I have to respect I live in other community now, so I dont have to wear such strict style I think.

**M: What other traditions do you practice? Do you pray?**

Z: Yes. Every Muslim must pray 5 times a day, morning before sunrise, noon, afternoon, sunset and night. That is basic. We have some extra prayers. But I do the basic. During Ramadan, we fast from sunrise to sunset. So

there are some additional prayers at night. I do not have much time here to do more. Because in Arabic countries during Ramadan the work, the school is less, some schools end earlier because of that. So we can sleep more and have more strength. But here I do not have that much time to do more prayers and so on because I have to study and so on.

**M: So what does veil mean to you?**

Z: First of all the identification, that I am Muslim. Secondly obeying the God, what does he want from me. Or what is written in Quran...but as I said it can be interpreted differently everywhere. So wearing hijab is also as a protection for Muslim women. It protects me. I do not wear it in front of women and there are some men I do not have to wear it in front of. So for me first it is identification, second the protection and third to show the beauty just for the husband, it is not for all people to see.

**M: When did you start wearing it?**

Z: When I was 15 I think. It is when you start menstruating, you should start wearing a veil.

**M: So for you it is more religious thing?**

Z: Yes. But I think if my mom would not wear it I would not wear it either.

**M: But you feel it is was your own decision?**

Z: Yes. Because when I first decided to veil, my family did not agree. Because I was young and my family did not want me to start wearing it and then next year put it away. So they told me I have to be really sure if I want to start to wear it. They even showed me some Youtube videos and materials about hijab, and if I still wanted to wear it, I should do it.

**M: So you think even if you decided not to wear it, it would be fine with your family?**

Z: Yes. For example my sister does not wear it. So in my family, it is my own decision. But there are families where there it is like a rule even if the girl do not want to wear it. So I know of this one girl who moved to Europe and she did not want to wear a veil but her family made it so then she put it away.

**M: And you yourself did not come across a point where you wanted to put it away?**

Z: There are rules in Islam, if there would be any danger for Muslim person, you do not have to obey these restrictions or practice these traditions if your life would be in danger because of it. For me it was pretty hard when I started to live in Prague, but not any extreme experience when I wanted to put it away. But there were some situations.

**M: Can you tell me about that?**

Z: There were some old people yelling at me why am I here, to go back to my country, why do I wear a veil, if I am sick. So just these sentences, nothing too extreme. I did not reply back. But happen to me one time when one old woman started really screaming, so then I could not be quiet. So I told her I did not make many mistake and I live here and that it is my own decision to wear the hijab.

**M: So it was these two experiences?**

Z: Yes, two of them when they were talking to me. Otherwise just looking. But I know I am dressed differently, especially in summer it is really visible. But in my opinion it is nice. I know that at the end of the day, I am foreign, so I cannot say everyone will respect me. Of course it is hard. For some friends it was harder, they wanted to only move in the centre of Prague. I just heard, I do not know if it is true or not, that in smaller town

the life is much easier if you put the hijab on. So that is why I do not want to move from Prague, because there is lot of foreign people here.

**M: If we talk about clothing in general. How important it is for you?**

Z: It depends where I live. In Syria, I have to wear longer bigger clothes. Here not so extreme, depends what I find in the shop.

**M: What about clothing on other people? How do you perceive the clothing of czech people?**

Z: I do not have any personal problem with anything. I feel like it is personal choice. But maybe some of my Arabic friends question why people wear such short things especially in summer, almost like beach clothes (laughter). But for me, I do not mind.

**M: What about the on-line world. How much time do you spend on social media?**

Z: When I have exam I put it away (laughter). But otherwise I spend and waste a lot of time, maybe sometimes even 10 hours. But when I worked in ICP for example I worked as social media manager for Arabic page on Facebook. I really like it. Also I use to contact it with my Brother, my aunt, my sister. Or friends in Syria.

**M: Which apps do you use the most?**

Z: Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp. Imo because that is only way to communicate with my Brother in Qatar, because other communication is banned there.

**M: For which purpose do you use these apps?**

Z: For example when the war in Syria started, we spend lot of time on the Internet on Facebook to communicate and get information. Because in TV there was just very little information, so my family was on Facebook a lot. There are some groups like all the people i Syria, so we know what is happening. Then I use it for groups in university, for the subjects to share study documents. Now I use it also to find out about the events.

**M: Are you member of any other groups?**

Z: Like Arabs in Czech Republic. There are two groups. They put news, like if someone dies, if someone opens a new shop, restaurant, when they find employees, like in Kebab places.

**M: Do you follow any content about veiling?**

Z: I did like two years ago. Istanbul fashion. But now I do not follow it because I live here now.

**M: And do you follow any content about religion or politics?**

Z: Maybe like CT24. But religion not at all. Now that Arab spring starts we follow what is happening. But now I do not agree so much with what is happening. So I stopped following it. Now there is lot of Islamophobia. For me religion is what you can read in Quran and what you have in heart and that is enough. So I do not follow it online.

**M: Did you ever get to a conflict in online space?**

Z: No I dont think so. If I dont agree with something I do not put any comment because I do not want any conflict.

**M: Were the social media on the other hand of any help to you?**

Z: Yes. There are lot of groups and people that can help you through it. And I stay in contact with them. Now I also do one thing that I am connecting all the doctors that speak Arabic through Facebook. Because I came across some problems during my work that there are lot of people that do not speak Czech and not even English. So they had troubles communicating with doctors. So I have some list of doctors who speak Arabic so I can spread it to other people.

**M: How do you feel Islam is portrayed in the media here?**

Z: Now not even in the Czech Republic but in the whole world there is not a nice image. There are bad people who do not have any religion or anything as well. Even in Arabic community if something bad happens it is always blamed on Muslims. So every time I try to give them an opposite Picture, positive of what we did right. It sometimes happened to me here when there was some bombing in the world people looked at me badly in the street.

**M: Do you feel like the overall portrayal of the media might have the power to change the negotiation of veiling behavior of yourself or other women?**

Z: Maybe for some girl who was born in Arabic country she will stay veiled all the time. For me when I moved to Prague I also did not know how it is gonna be and I knew some friends that I knew they would not veil here. Some of their friends do not know that they are Muslim at all because they do not veil, talk about religion or go to the party. For me it would be hard to put it away but there are some cases where there is opposite issue.

**M: Thank you so much for your time.**

**Appendix no.: 2 Results of the Group Project Research**

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**Results**

Answering the raised research question about what the role of new media in young Dutch-Muslim women's negotiation of veiling behaviors lies within four below discussed topics.

**Foundations of family traditions**

Based on the results, two out of four respondents do veil or will start veiling soon. The respondents also provide their points of view on what are the reasons behind veiling behavior. Hence, one of the interviewed respondents was talking quite positively about wearing hijab yet she was not wearing it yet: *“Right now I do not yet wear my hijab, but I am very close to making the step of wearing it. For me, the hijab is something beautiful. I believe that everything that is precious in our lives should be stored in a beautiful, covered way.”* (Respondent 1, the Netherlands). It has been also proven that despite she was born in the Netherlands she still carries her original traditions such as eating Suriname food and celebrating Birthday in a different way compared to Dutch. Furthermore, she was not committed first to her religion but consequently, she started to do her own research on the use of new media. It is clear from data interpretation, that the base towards Muslim religion lies within a family. As such if a family had not put an emphasis on their original traditions at first place, young Muslim women would not have related themselves towards this religion. As the result, all four respondents carry a lot of religious traditions within their family, thus, how they were raised as well as how family presented their cultural

and original traditions to their children played a crucial role in how the respondents pose their attitudes towards their Muslim religion and wearing a veil.

Confirming the point about family traditions and environment, for one of the respondents it had a big influence as well so she was supporting that by saying: *"I haven't looked for anything regarding veiling, I think it's mainly due to my country of origin. If people practiced my religion to the depth that they do in Syria, then I think it would motivate me to do it more."* (Respondent 2, the UK). Thus, being born in the UK and the way that she was raised had an extensive influence on her attitude towards veiling and her original religion in general. The next topic that helps to answer the research question relates to attitudes and portrayal of Muslims in the host media.

### **Attitudes and portrayal from the host media**

During the process of data analysis, it has been found out that in general there is a negative attitude from society towards wearing hijab. It has been traced not only from experience shared by the respondents but also in terms of new media and how Muslim women are portrayed there. That was also the reason why one of the respondents was scared to start veiling by saying: *"I have to say that I feel like the media portrays Islam and for example veiled women as something negative, which actually has an impact on me. I have the feeling that whenever I wear the headscarf, I am sometimes seen as a stranger. I feel like people have a prejudice already before they even talk to me."* (Respondent 1, the NL). However, it is important to mention that one of the respondents actually experienced only positive side when living in the Netherlands, thus she was sharing: *"Since I've never experienced any negative contents from Dutch media especially about my veiling behavior, so I'm not affected at all. Moreover, the only content I've ever seen about veiling in the Western countries is positive so I feel supported and respected."* (Respondent 3, Indonesia)

When asked whether new media helped the respondents to overcome challenges regarding veiling in their migrated country one of the respondents indeed found it a useful tool: *"I definitely do think that it helped a number of things. In Western media Muslims are always portrayed in a specific type of way whereas here there's less of the stereotype and more people are very open-minded to different cultures."* (Respondent 2, the UK). The other respondent also felt that media portray veiling of Muslim women as negative yet has not experienced that in her life: *"I know that there are negative stereotypes about veiling, especially related to the extremist believer. However, I've never experienced any negative action or even question about my veil. I think it's because the way I wear the veil that is quite modern and modest, so people can accept me like I'm a normal person, not a terrorist or something."* (Respondent 3, Indonesia). In general, it can be concluded that veiling is stereotyped in a negative way by new media.

Moreover, one of the respondents who was born in Amsterdam and who does not veil, strongly proves that her surroundings significantly influence her choice of not veiling, which is also supported by the theory of Brünig and Fleischmann (2015). In their research, they also claimed that even Muslim women with the strong identity consider the decision of veiling as hard and resolve not to because of a prejudiced attitude of Dutch society towards them. Thus one of the respondents was claiming: *"I feel like it is everybody's own choice if they want to wear a veil or not. And if people ask me why I do not wear the veil even though I am a Muslim, I always*



*answer with: I feel like I am not ready for it. Because you have to adjust a lot of things in your life with wearing a veil. Like clothes and your behavior etc. I really think it is pretty and beautiful and very powerful because it conceals the beauty of the woman. And it is a symbol of religion.”* (Respondent 2, the UK). The next topic discusses how new media are used by the immigrants, which will help to understand what is the role of it in their veiling behavior.

### **New media usages by immigrants**

New media usages refer to the online activities that respondents do regarding veiling behaviors, focusing on the active role of immigrants in the use of new media to negotiate their identities. All the respondents spend considerable time on new media platforms each day.

From their experiences, there are two main usages of new media related to hijabs. By using new media, firstly, they consume and gather news and views about veiling in the Netherlands to discover the situation and possibility of wearing hijabs, both for the respondents who previously veil and not veil. Mostly used new media platforms are YouTube, Facebook, which explore the situation of hijabs in the Netherlands and include some related discussions. Immigrants can gain the basic information and insights about the Dutch overall acceptance of the behaviors, which affects their veiling choices.

In particular, for the respondents who want to start or keep veiling habits in the Netherlands, they have a higher frequency of doing this kind of online activities. For example, respondent 1, who was born here and prepare to start veiling recently, mentioned that she *"watches videos that include the reason behind veiling, why women in Islam wear a veil/hijab, what the logic behind it is...and videos from hijab vloggers to see how they wrap their veils ..."*. Besides, respondent 3, who comes from Indonesia and moved here 2 years ago, said that *"I used to spend some time to look for information about veiling before I decided to use this...and look for the discussion about veiling and its law based on the religion side"*. New media platforms have offered a plenty of practical information and guideline for those who want to veil in the Netherlands and facilitate their decisions.

The other main usage of new media by immigrants is discovering modern veiling styles to keep up latest hijab trends and even promote fashion hijabs products. During this process, Instagram and YouTube serve as dominant platforms, on which they follow famous hijab fashion accounts, search for fashion inspiration and even create their own account to promote hijab contents. Both respondents, whether they veil or not, are interested in hijab fashions. Respondent 4 (the NL), who do not veil at all, said *"I do follow some girls on Instagram who wear the veil. They call it modest fashion. It's kinda cool to see how they style the clothes with the veil. I do have respect for their creativity."* Besides, respondent 1 talked about her experience of managing the Instagram account of her mother's company that sells modest hijab products and starting an Instagram account where she promotes hijab women and their outfits.

In particular, the respondents who want to veil in the host society gain a sense of support and encouragement of veiling from other young Muslim women's accounts of modest hijabs, which serve as communities for sharing hijabs appearance. As respondent 3 said, *"I look for the latest trend to convince myself that I can look good by using the veil"*. Besides, by consuming these shared fashion contents, they aim to develop their own styles of veiling that suits them best. Respondent 1 mentioned that *"since I have always been*

*into fashion, I want to develop my own style wearing it so a lot of time also goes out to search up such information about veiling.”*

Furthermore, through this intense online activity, they have the tendency to cultivate aesthetic meanings and logic of veiling in addition to religious aspects as well as to develop their own veiling values. In this sense, the “tangible marker” difference of veiling (Droogsma, 2007) tend to be reduced. From respondent 1’s perspective, veiling is not only related to religions and hijab itself is a beautiful stuff. And respondent 2 also mentioned that people just wear it to wear and “it does not necessarily define a person.”

Respondent 4 even raised the possibility that other people may change the perception of a veil in the fashion world, saying that *“every woman would love to wear designer stuff and especially when they dedicate a part of the designs to them.”*

### **Perceptions of others**

Perceptions of others refer to the impressions and views of other people. Immigrants in the host society are inevitable to be observed and exerted impressions by the locals. According to the majority of the respondents, physical cues, especially the appearance of veiling, play a crucial role in how other people perceive them. Most impressions are related to stereotyped or biased markers.

Respondent 1 explained the situations where she went to the municipality twice, one with a hijab and the other without hijab, but, what surprised her is the diverse attitudes from the same people: *“I remember one day I went to the municipality to make photos of my hijab for my trip to Mecca and explain to them what I was going to do. I had the feeling that they did not really respond at all, and then the next month I went to that same municipality without my hijab to make photos for my passport, and it was pretty funny because that same woman helped me and suddenly she was all interested in me, she asked me where I’d go on vacation in the summer and all (Respondent 1, the Netherlands).*

Respondent 4 also expressed her dissatisfaction about others’ biased perception of Muslim women through veiling, saying that *“I mean nuns also wear a veil... it’s almost like a niqab so sometimes I feel that people are a hypocrite.”*

Even though respondent 3 did not have such discouraging experiences, she also mentioned the importance of veiling appearance that others use to judge a Muslim woman: *“I think it’s because the way I wear the veil that is quite modern and modest, so people can accept me like I’m a normal person, not a terrorist or something” (Respondent 3, Indonesia).*