

Advanced 3
Unit 1 Reading
Presented by Mohammad Rajabpur

Maintaining Their Identity

A

Rebea Murtaza is a 17-year-old high school student who wears a teenager's uniform of blouse, jeans, and Birkenstock sandals but with a difference. A devout Muslim, Ms. Murtaza never goes out in public without her hijab: a scarf that covers her head and shoulders.

devout = pious; religious

B

Last year, the Grade-12 student decided she wanted to observe her hijab: the canon law of Islam that dictates that once a woman reaches puberty, every part of her body except her face, hands, and feet must be covered. Emotionally, Ms. Murtaza was prepared to cloak her body and lower her gaze when in the company of men. Still, the reaction from her peers in Grade 11 shocked her. "I was in the hallway and people would say, 'She's a weirdo,'" said Ms. Murtaza, a student at Earl Haig Secondary School in the Metro Toronto municipality of North York. "It hurt. I don't like being thought of as a freak or different or weird."

canon law = ecclesiastical law, especially (in the Roman Catholic Church) that laid down by papal pronouncements

puberty = reaching sexual maturity

cloak = cover

lower (v.) ≠ raise

gaze (n.) = look

in the company of = with

weirdo = a weird person

freak = a crazy person

C

Ms. Murtaza is among a small but growing number of young Muslim women in Toronto's Islamic community of 105,000 who have found the call of Islam and the commitment to wear hijab irresistible. According to Statistics Canada census information, in 1991 there were about 253,000 Muslims in Canada, with the majority (145,000) settled in Ontario. With more and more Muslim immigrants choosing Ontario as their new home (statistics show that last year 2,500 immigrants came from Somalia, 2,500 from Iran, 2,600 from Pakistan, and 2,000 from Iraq), young Muslims who grew up in Canada feel emboldened by the growing number of their co-religionists and are increasingly comfortable expressing their emerging identity.

commitment = obligation; responsibility

irresistible = attractive

census = head-count

majority ≠ minority

settle = set up home; put down roots

co-religionist = a person who believes in the same religion as us
express (v.) = state; say

D

"Wearing hijab is my way of saying I'm Muslim and Canadian," said Ms. Murtaza, who, with three classmates who are also new hijabis, persuaded school officials to designate a classroom where they could pray during school hours. "Being Canadian means making your own choices and choosing your own lifestyle. It's not about doing what your parents or peers want, but doing what you feel is right," she said. She explained that modesty is prescribed in two verses in the Koran. One says, "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them." In a later verse, the same instructions are directed toward Muslim women: "O, Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their persons when out of doors." Over the centuries, the concept of hijab—meaning literally "curtain," requiring both men and women to be modest and chaste—has evolved into the long flowing robes and headdresses worn by many Muslims today.

designate = choose; select

modesty = chastity; moderation; humility

verse = a sentence in a holy book

thy (Archaic) = your

garment = clothes; clothing

chaste = pure; modest; not touched by anybody

E

Yasmin Zine, 31, a master's student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto, whose research thesis explores how immigrant women negotiate and reconstruct their identity when they land in a new culture, says she is increasingly encountering hijabis who are young and university educated and who have chosen to cover up after studying Islam extensively. "By rejecting Western norms and conventions that have dominated their lives. Muslim women are able to create a new identity. for themselves." said Mrs. Zinc. "They are fighting a culture that is not consistent with Islamic ideas, and are asking that they be judged by their spiritual, rather than physical characteristics." Mrs. Zinc said they are saying. "We realize there is a dominant culture in Canada, but we don't have to be part of it." At the same time, they have to contend with hostile stares and cruel comments from people who consider their dress an oddity.

extensively = a lot; very much

dominant = main

hostile = unfriendly

contend with = try to deal with

oddity = strange thing

F

Sajidah Kutty's life was a roller coaster ride from the day she started wearing hijab in Grade 6. When she came to school wrapped in a scarf and baggy, shapeless clothing, her friends, seeing

her in the hallway, ignored her and walked by without a word. "I lost a lot of friends because of it," she said. "I came to expect more looks, more name-calling. Mostly Paki." Ms. Kutty, 22, now a mass communications and creative writing student at York University in Toronto, feels that today's hijabis definitely have it easier because there are more of them. "There's such an increase in it now," she said, gesturing toward the five women seated at a table with her in the basement of the Islamic Foundation in Scarborough. They are among the burgeoning number of young hijabis who choose to attend Friday-night study sessions at the mosque instead of partying with their peers.

name-calling = insult; abusive words; curse; swearing

burgeoning = increasing; growing

G

Ms. Kutty attributes the increased interest in Islam and subsequent observance of hijab to the war in the Persian Gulf. She said young secular Muslims were shaken into self-examination by the backlash against Muslim fundamentalists. In looking at the source of discrimination, "We discovered our own faith. We discovered we were different, but it made us stronger. So we banded together." In doing so, these young Muslims have begun to analyze the Koran and to attend religious discussions. One discovery was that many of their parents' habits, which they thought were prompted by religious observance, are actually cultural in origin.

attribute sth to sth = relate sth to sth; ascribe sth to sth

subsequent = following

backlash = reaction

fundamentalist = a person who believes in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture in a religion

discrimination = unfair treatment

prompt (v.) = make sth happen; cause; bring about

H

For instance, an Islamic marriage is made through a contract that is confirmed when the bride receives a marriage portion, called *mahr* from the groom. Mahr is for the bride's exclusive use in case her husband dies, or if they are divorced or there is an emergency. In India and Pakistan, the bride receives mahr but she is also expected to provide her jahez—which consists of the bride's clothing, jewelry, and other possessions, as well as gifts for the groom and his family. The tradition of the jahez is not Islamic, but is rooted in India, and more specifically Hindu culture. New hijabis reject the jahez because they feel it places a burden on the bride to shower the groom with expensive gifts.

jahez = dowry

burden = pressure; extra load

I

Hina Khan, 20, a member of the Scarborough mosque's youth group, said that ultimately, she rejects Pakistani culture. "I have to follow the Islamic culture." "First-generation teenage Muslims and other members of the younger generation are more confident expressing their

individuality than their immigrant parents were," said Maqbool Aziz, a professor of English at McMaster University in Hamilton. Ms. Khan said some of the fiercest reactions to hijab came from her parents—in particular her mother, who does not cover up. Her mother fears her daughter's beliefs will reduce her chances of a successful arranged marriage because her values will be interpreted as militant by prospective Pakistani suitors. Ms. Khan rejects the concept of a traditional arranged marriage, and firmly believes God will find her a husband. "If Allah has somebody for me, then I will get married." "Otherwise," she said, "it is not something I worry about."

ultimately = finally

fierce = violent

suitor = a man/boy who proposes to a woman/girl

prospective = expected; probable

Full Text:

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Last year, the Grade-12 student decided she wanted to observe her hijab: the canon law of Islam that dictates that once a woman reaches puberty, every part of her body except her face, hands, and feet must be covered. Emotionally, Ms. Murtaza was prepared to cloak her body and lower her gaze when in the company of men. Still, the reaction from her peers in Grade 11 shocked her. "I was in the hallway and people would say, 'She's a weirdo,'" said Ms. Murtaza, a student at Earl Haig Secondary School in the Metro Toronto municipality of North York. "It hurt. I don't like being thought of as a freak or different or weird."

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For instance, an Islamic marriage is made through a contract that is confirmed when the bride receives a marriage portion, called *mahr* from the groom. Mahr is for the bride's exclusive use in case her husband dies, or if they are divorced or there is an emergency. In India and Pakistan,

the bride receives mahr but she is also expected to provide her jahez—which consists of the bride's clothing, jewelry, and other possessions, as well as gifts for the groom and his family. The tradition of the jahez is not Islamic, but is rooted in India, and more specifically Hindu culture. New hijabis reject the jahez because they feel it places a burden on the bride to shower the groom with expensive gifts.

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Hina Khan, 20, a member of the Scarborough mosque's youth group, said that ultimately, she rejects Pakistani culture. "I have to follow the Islamic culture." "First-generation teenage Muslims and other members of the younger generation are more confident expressing their individuality than their immigrant parents were," said Maqbool Aziz, a professor of English at McMaster University in Hamilton. Ms. Khan said some of the fiercest reactions to hijab came from her parents—in particular her mother, who does not cover up. Her mother fears her daughter's beliefs will reduce her chances of a successful arranged marriage because her values will be interpreted as militant by prospective Pakistani suitors. Ms. Khan rejects the concept of a traditional arranged marriage, and firmly believes God will find her a husband. "If Allah has somebody for me, then I will get married." "Otherwise," she said, "it is not something I worry about."

The Text in Simple English:

Maintaining Their Identity

A

Rebea Murtaza is a 17-year-old high school student. She wears a blouse, jeans, and Birkenstock sandals like many teenagers. However, she is a devout Muslim and always wears a hijab, a scarf that covers her head and shoulders, when she goes out.

B

Last year, Rebea, who is in Grade 12, decided to follow the Islamic rule of wearing hijab. This rule says that once a girl reaches puberty, she must cover her whole body except her face, hands, and feet. Rebea was ready to cover herself and avoid eye contact with men. But her classmates in Grade 11 reacted badly. "I was in the hallway and people would say, 'She's a weirdo,'" said Rebea, who goes to Earl Haig Secondary School in North York, Toronto. "It hurt. I don't like being thought of as strange or different."

C

Ms. Murtaza is one of the many young Muslim women in Toronto who have chosen to follow Islam and wear hijab. In 1991, there were about 253,000 Muslims in Canada, with most of them living in Ontario. As more Muslim immigrants move to Ontario, young Muslims who grew up in Canada feel more confident and comfortable showing their identity.

D

Ms. Murtaza says that wearing hijab shows she is both Muslim and Canadian. She and three friends, who also started wearing hijabs, asked their school to provide a room for them to pray. She believes being Canadian means making your own choices and living how you want, not

just following others. She explains that the Koran has verses about modesty for both men and women. One verse tells men to be modest, and another tells women to cover themselves when outside. Over time, the idea of hijab has become the long robes and head coverings many Muslims wear today.

E

Yasmin Zine, a 31-year-old master's student in Toronto, studies how immigrant women adapt to new cultures. She notices more young, educated Muslim women choosing to wear hijab after learning about Islam. These women reject Western norms to create their own identity. They want to be judged by their spiritual qualities, not their looks. Yasmin says they acknowledge Canada's dominant culture but choose not to follow it. However, they often face negative reactions from people who find their dress unusual.

F

Sajidah Kutty's life changed a lot when she started wearing a hijab in Grade 6. Her friends ignored her when they saw her in a scarf and loose clothes. "I lost many friends because of it," she said. "I got used to people staring and calling me names, mostly 'Paki'." Now 22 and studying mass communications and creative writing at York University in Toronto, Sajidah thinks it's easier for hijabis today because there are more of them. "There are so many more now," she said, pointing to five women with her at the Islamic Foundation in Scarborough. These young hijabis prefer attending Friday-night study sessions at the mosque over partying with their peers.

G

Ms. Kutty believes that the Persian Gulf War increased interest in Islam and wearing hijab. She said that young Muslims who were not very religious started to think more about their faith because of the negative reactions to Muslim extremists. They realized their faith made them different but stronger, so they united. These young Muslims began studying the Koran and attending religious talks. They also found out that many practices they thought were religious were actually cultural.

H

In an Islamic marriage, the bride gets a marriage gift called mahr from the groom. This mahr is for her to use if her husband dies, they get divorced, or in an emergency. In India and Pakistan, the bride also has to give jahez, which includes her clothes, jewelry, and gifts for the groom and his family. The jahez tradition is not Islamic; it comes from Indian and Hindu culture. New hijabis reject jahez because they think it unfairly burdens the bride with giving expensive gifts to the groom.

I

Hina Khan, a 20-year-old member of the Scarborough mosque's youth group, says she rejects Pakistani culture and follows Islamic culture instead. According to Maqbool Aziz, a professor at McMaster University, young Muslims today are more confident in expressing their individuality than their immigrant parents. Hina mentioned that her parents, especially her mother who doesn't wear a hijab, reacted strongly to her decision to wear one. Her mother worries that Hina's beliefs might hurt her chances of a successful arranged marriage because

potential Pakistani suitors might see her as too extreme. Hina, however, does not believe in traditional arranged marriages and trusts that God will find her a husband. “If Allah has someone for me, then I will get married,” she said. “Otherwise, it’s not something I worry about.”

Source:

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