

## Outside my skin: on the discourse of Muslim women's attire

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A Muslim woman's choice of attire is a negotiation of a space for herself between the Muslim community and its demands and the multi-ethnic context of the country. It is a choice that would give her the most agencies within the framework she has to work with. It is a choice regulated by such issues as her social class, social pressure, family "traditions" and social context. It is a choice made according to what makes her feel most comfortable in her environment.

According to Althusser's theory of interpellation, a Muslim woman is a Muslim woman before she is born. Within the State Apparatus she is subjected through the ritual of hailing. Individuals accept this interpellation and conform to it by acknowledging and responding to it. The moment this identity is enforced on her, she is a part of the ideology of the State Apparatus. The Muslim woman, interpellated into this State Apparatus, needs to find a way to manoeuvre within this restricted space. The Muslim woman is not an individual, but a *type*. The moment she tries to escape the *type* she becomes an exception. She has to make choices with regard to her appearance to negotiate with her diverse roles within the dynamic sociology of the state, while remaining a Muslim woman. Therefore interpellation wise, Muslim women are negotiating a place for themselves within the state. Negotiating interpellation in order to interpellate themselves. Interpellation and interpellation.

A Muslim woman is marked by her attire. It includes her and excludes her from certain spheres of society. Her attire announces her first as a Muslim woman and everything else about her is subordinate to that. She is a Muslim woman and not an individual. She is also a symbol of Muslim identity within the country. Interestingly it is the Muslim woman who is a community marker.

Interviews of women from different social, regional and economic backgrounds offer a wide range of responses as to how they negotiate with the forces at hand and develop identities for themselves. How they invent themselves as Muslim women and perform this role. And how comfortable or uncomfortable they are amidst mixed ethnicities, where they are looked at as the other, and the issues such a predicament would raise.

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