

BEAUTY, MODESTY, AND THE BRIDAL BODY: NIQAB-WEARING WOMEN IN BANJARESE WEDDING CEREMONY

Khalilah Nur ‘Azmy, Wening Udasmoro

UIN Antasari, Universitas Gadjah Mada

khalilah.nurazmy@gmail.com , udasmoro@ugm.ac.id

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana perempuan bercadar menegosiasi standar ideal kecantikan pengantin dan konsep kesopanan dalam lanskap prosesi acara perkawinan pada masyarakat Banjar di Kalimantan Selatan, Indonesia. Data kualitatif melalui wawancara dari beberapa perempuan bercadar dan observasi digunakan untuk menggambarkan proses negosiasi tersebut. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa pengantin bercadar tidak semata tunduk pada standar kecantikan pengantin yang dominan, tidak pula menolaknya secara brutal. Dalam kajian ini, pengantin bercadar terlibat dalam negosiasi terus menerus dengan etika keagamaan, ekspektasi komunal, dan konstruksi feminitas pengantin dalam praktik-praktik seperti: memilih penggunaan cadar secara selektif, penetapan batas ruang, serta penafsiran ulang makna praktik kecantikan dalam ruang publik. Negosiasi tersebut menampilkan realita bahwasanya kecantikan, kesopanan, ketaatan, dan tubuh perempuan terus mengalami rekonfigurasi dalam lanskap pernikahan yang sarat ritual dan telah menjadi bagian dari industri komersial.

Kata Kunci: Perempuan bercadar; Kecantikan pengantin; Kesopanan; Negosiasi; Banjar; Pernikahan

Abstract

This article sees how niqab-wearing women negotiate ideals of bridal beauty and modesty within wedding ceremony in Banjar society, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. Drawing on interviews with niqabi brides and observations of wedding ceremonies, the study explores how ritualized beauty—typically associated with bodily display and visual excess—interacts with religious commitments to veiling and restraint. The findings show that niqabi brides do not simply comply with dominant bridal beauty, nor do they reject them outright. Instead, they engage in ongoing negotiations between religious ethics, communal expectations, and bridal femininity through selective veiling, spatial regulations, and reinterpretations of beautification as a ritual obligation rather than a form of public display. These negotiations reveal how beauty, modesty, and the female body are continuously reconfigured within highly ritualized and commercialized wedding settings.

Keywords: *Niqab-wearing women, Bridal beauty, Modesty, Negotiation, Banjarese, Wedding ceremony*

Introduction

In Indonesian wedding ceremonies, took cultural, religious, and aesthetic values converge in ways that intensify gendered expectations of feminine appearance. Bridal culture places particular emphasis on beautification practices that construct the bride as a visual center of the event, requiring her to embody ideals of beauty, elegance, and spectacle that exceed everyday standards of appearance.¹ Feminine beautification² in this context is not merely decorative, but operates as a social and symbolic process through which women's bodies are evaluated, recognized, and disciplined.³ As feminist scholars have long argued, beauty practices are embedded in broader power relations that link femininity, visibility, and social value, positioning women's bodies as sites of both regulation and meaning-making.⁴

Wedding ceremonies intensify these dynamics by framing beautification as a once-in-a-lifetime obligation. The bride is expected to undergo dramatic bodily transformation through makeup, dress, and adornment, justified by the notion that she is the "star" of the occasion and thus must meet heightened aesthetic standards.⁵ Deviation from these norms risks being read as failure, inadequacy, or disrespect toward

communal expectations. In this sense, the bridal body becomes what Bartky describes as "a body on which an inferior status has been inscribed." It's disciplined through norms that appear celebratory yet remain deeply regulatory.⁶ While feminist critiques have debated whether beautification constitutes oppression, pleasure, or agency, scholars increasingly emphasize the need to examine women's situated experiences within specific cultural and ritual contexts rather than treating beauty practices as uniformly coercive or empowering.⁷

This article examines these tensions through the experiences of niqab-wearing women who become brides within Islamic wedding ceremony. In Indonesia, where every day religious practice does not generally require women to cover the face, the niqab occupies an ambivalent position. While it has become an increasingly visible choice among some Muslim women, it still continues to be associated with notions of religious conservatism, foreignness, or moral distinction.⁸ The niqab's function—to conceal the face, often understood as the primary locus of feminine beauty—stands in apparent contradiction to bridal aesthetics that demand visibility, display, and visual excess. This contradiction becomes especially pronounced in

¹ Dewi Meyrasyawati, "Fesyen dan Identitas: Simbolisasi Budaya dan Agama dalam Busana Pengantin Jawa Muslim di Surabaya," *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia* 17, no. 2 (2013): 15, <https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v17i2.2955>.

² The term "feminine beautification," which is frequently used in this article, is borrowed from Bartky (1990) and Cahill (2003). It refers to practices, performances, and bodily modifications associated with making women appear "beautiful" according to social, cultural, religious, or gendered expectations of femininity. These practices include makeup, hairstyling, skincare, dress, jewelry, body posture, adornment, and other forms of aesthetic presentation that construct or emphasize femininity.

³ Simone de Beauvoir, "The Second Sex," in *Social Theory Re-Wired*, 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2023), 301.

⁴ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (Random House, 2013), 17.

⁵ Bonnie Adrian, *Framing the Bride: Globalizing Beauty and Romance in Taiwan's Bridal Industry* (University of California Press, 2003), 14.

⁶ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (Routledge, 2015), <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/mono/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9780203825259&type=googlepdf>.

⁷ Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (NYU Press, 2000), see also Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body* (1995); Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* (2000).

⁸ Perdana Aisha Puteri *The Popular Face-Veil In Indonesia: The Quest For The New Meanings*, (Tesis, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2018). See also D.S Asran and Udasmoro, "Konstruksi Identitas Niqabis Melalui Selfie Instagram," *Jurnal Kawistara* 10, no. 2 (2020): 15.

weddings, where the bride's face is conventionally central to aesthetic appreciation, photography, and public recognition.

Previous studies on niqab-wearing women have largely focused on questions of identity, resistance, and representation. Early scholarship often responded to Western stereotypes that equated face veiling with religious fundamentalism or women's oppression, particularly in the context of Islamophobia after 2001.⁹ More recent work has shifted attention toward niqabi women's agency, emphasizing choice, subjectivity, and the multiplicity of meanings attached to veiling practices.¹⁰ In the Indonesian context, scholars have documented the emergence of what has been termed "the new face-veil" wearers—women who are socially active, publicly visible, and engaged in ongoing negotiations between piety, fashion, and cultural belonging.¹¹ Studies of social media further illustrate how niqabi women selectively manage bodily display and self-representation within dominant visual cultures.¹²

While this growing body of literature has significantly expanded understandings of niqab, embodiment, and visibility, less attention has been paid to how these negotiations unfold within highly ritualized life events that intensify aesthetic and gendered expectations. Wedding ceremonies constitute such a moment. As ritualized public performances, weddings do not simply reflect everyday norms but actively produce and amplify them through symbolic acts,

spatial arrangements, and visual economies.¹³ Bridal beauty, in this sense, is not only a matter of personal preference but a ritual obligation shaped by religious symbolism, communal judgment, and the expanding influence of the wedding and beauty industries. Examining niqab-wearing brides within this context allows for a more nuanced understanding of how bodily visibility is negotiated when both religious modesty and aesthetic display are simultaneously demanded.

This study is situated in Banjar society, South Kalimantan, a predominantly Muslim community where wedding ceremonies function as important religious and social events. Rather than treating Banjar culture as either exceptional or representative of Indonesian Islam as a whole, this article approaches it as a situated religious context of localized wedding ceremony in which broader discourses on piety, gender, and beauty become particularly visible. Wedding rituals in Banjar society combine Islamic norms, local customs, and commercialized bridal aesthetics, creating a performative space where women's bodies are closely observed and evaluated. Focusing on niqab-wearing brides within this context enables an exploration of how global ideals of modesty and beauty are locally interpreted and negotiated.

Islamic discourses on beauty further complicate these negotiations. While Islam is often portrayed as restrictive toward women's appearance, scholars have shown that Islamic

⁹ Meena Sharify-Funk, "Governing the Face Veil: Quebec's Bill 94 and the Transnational Politics of Women's Identity," *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, no. 43 (2011): 135–63, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ijcs/2011-n43-ijcs0122/1009458ar/abstract/>. See also Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil* (1999); and Naima Bouteldja (2011).

¹⁰ Diana Safinda Asran and Wening Udasmoro, "Konstruksi Identitas Niqabis Melalui Selfie Instagram," *Jurnal Kawistara* 10, no. 2 (2020): 159, <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=76837675>.

¹¹ "The Popular Face-Veil In Indonesia."

¹² Anna Piela, *Wearing the Niqab: Muslim Women in the UK and the US* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021)

¹³ Emily Fairchild, "Examining Wedding Rituals through a Multidimensional Gender Lens: The Analytic Importance of Attending to (In)Consistency," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 43, no. 3 (2014): 361–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241613497750>.

texts and traditions articulate a more complex relationship with beauty, emphasizing cleanliness, adornment, and aesthetic harmony alongside modesty and restraint.¹⁴ Qur'anic injunctions encouraging adornment in specific contexts coexist with normative frameworks regulating women's appearance through concepts such as *'awra*¹⁵ and *tabarruj*¹⁶, which have been variously interpreted across time and place.¹⁷ Feminist scholars have highlighted how these interpretations are often shaped by patriarchal assumptions, yet also subject to reinterpretation by women themselves.¹⁸ For niqab-wearing women, beauty is therefore not rejected outright but reframed within ethical, religious, and situational considerations.

This article approaches negotiation as an process through which women navigate competing expectations surrounding beauty, modesty, bodily visibility, and communal belonging. This expectation is formed by the notion that negotiation is not neutral, it reflect how gender and power interact.¹⁹ Negotiation, in this sense, refers to the ways niqabi women continuously manage, reinterpret, accommodate, or resist dominant norms within the highly performative setting of wedding ceremony.

Building on these debates, this article asks: *How do niqab-wearing women negotiate bodily visibility, beauty norms, and religious commitment within the performative space of Islamic wedding ceremony?* Drawing on

interviews with niqabi brides and observations of wedding ceremonies conducted between 2019 and 2025, the study shows that niqabi brides neither simply submit to dominant bridal aesthetics nor entirely resist them. Instead, they manage visibility through strategies such as selective unveiling, spatial regulation, and reinterpretations of beautification as a ritual duty rather than a form of public display. These practices demonstrate how beauty, piety, and the female body are negotiated within highly ritualized and commercialized settings, complicating assumptions that equate veiling with passivity or aesthetic refusal.

By foregrounding the wedding as a one-day ritual that intensifies aesthetic demands, this article contributes to gender and Islamic studies by shifting attention from everyday practices or media representations to ritualized moments where norms are most visibly enforced and contested. It argues that niqab-wearing women's negotiations of beauty are neither exceptional nor anomalous, but part of broader processes through which religious women actively navigate competing moral, cultural, and aesthetic regimes.

Niqabi Brides and the Cultural Ritual Space of the Wedding

In the Indonesian context, niqab-wearing is often associated with *hijrah* narratives and, in academic discourse, frequently linked to Salafi or Jama'ah Tabligh movements²⁰, despite the

¹⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Suny Press, 1987).

¹⁵ *Aura* means all body parts that should not be exposed in public in Islamic teaching

¹⁶ *Tabarruj* means a woman's style of dress or attitude that is excessive to attract the attention of others when she comes out of her house, deliberately showing the beauty of her face and body and waving her way so that she can see the jewelry in front of other people.

¹⁷ Riza Lailaturohmah et al., "The Meaning Of Tabarruj In The Perspective Of Indonesian Mufasirs (Schleiermacher Hermeneutics Analysis)," *International Journal Of*

Research 1, no. 2 (2023): 191–212, <http://ojs.iaisumbar.ac.id/index.php/ijr/article/view/341>.

¹⁸ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2011) p 122.

¹⁹ Alice F. Stuhlmacher and Eileen Linnabery, "Gender and Negotiation: A Social Role Analysis," in *Handbook of Research on Negotiation*, ed. Mara Olekalns and Wendi L. Adair (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 234.

²⁰ Siti Tarwiyah, "Perkembangan dan Tantangan Sosial Kehidupan Perempuan Salafi Di Kalimantan Selatan," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 15, no. 2 (2018).

diversity of niqabi practices and motivations. In Muslim-majority Southeast Asia—where the headscarf is the dominant form of veiling—the niqab remains socially marked and often perceived as “other” to prevailing norms of piety. In South Kalimantan, where Islamic life is characterized by ideological plurality within a largely traditionalist environment, these associations can produce moral tension at the level of family, community, and intimate social encounters. Several participants were acutely aware of such stereotypes, particularly when returning to their family homes or preparing for public events such as weddings.

At the same time, the participants’ paths to niqab practice were varied. Some adopted the niqab through religious study environments such as Qur’anic dormitories or Islamic boarding programs; others through peer and family networks or personal reflection. While a few were exposed to Salafi or Jama’ah Tabligh teachings, others did not identify with these movements, underscoring the limits of ideological reduction and highlighting the plurality of niqabi subjectivities. These backgrounds shaped how participants entered marriage already positioned within overlapping moral expectations related to religious discipline, familial authority, and communal visibility.

Importantly, the term *niqabi bride* in this study does not refer solely to women who wore the niqab during their wedding ceremony, but to women who consistently practiced niqab in everyday life and encountered aesthetic demands during marriage ceremony, including cases where the niqab was temporarily removed. This definitional choice reflects a broader social phenomenon in Indonesia, where everyday veiling practices are often renegotiated during weddings. By including these variations, the study captures a range of responses to ritualized

feminine beautification rather than presuming a singular niqabi position.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, which facilitated access to relational networks and trust in discussing a sensitive topic. Interviews were conducted in 2021 and 2025. The primary criterion for participation was a sustained commitment to wearing the niqab prior to the wedding ceremony. The wedding itself was treated as a critical ritual moment, as it commonly requires feminine beautification and heightened bodily visibility within this local ceremonial context. Although ten participants were initially approached, discussions of feminine beautification in the context of weddings proved emotionally and socially charged. Several participants were reluctant to continue or to elaborate on their experiences, often reflecting internal tensions and concerns about stigma. Six participants were therefore selected for in-depth analysis, as their narratives most clearly articulated the negotiations central to this study.

The six participants—referred to by pseudonyms as Haura (34), Amalia (29), Shofwa (28), Widuri (29), Ghea (27), and Laili (25)—were married between 2016 and 2024, a period marked by the growing visibility of niqab-wearing women within Indonesia’s wedding and beauty industries. Their wedding practices reflected distinct forms of negotiation: Haura (married in 2016), Ghea (married in 2024), and Laili (married in 2025) maintained the niqab throughout the ceremony; Amalia (married in 2019) removed her niqab and opted for light makeup; Shofwa (married in 2018) removed her niqab and chose bold makeup; and Widuri (married in 2020) wore the niqab on one of the wedding costume while adjusting its style to match the wedding costume. The sequence of marriage years also suggests shifts in how niqabi brides engage with aesthetic norms, pointing to a

dynamic rather than static relationship between religious dress and bridal beauty.

The interviews were semi-structured and designed to elicit experiential narratives rather than fixed positions. Reflexive awareness was maintained throughout the research process, recognizing the interview as a co-constructed space. To avoid positioning participants solely as religious subjects, interviews emphasized their experiences as brides, using prompts such as “*What was your dream wedding?*” to foreground emotional investments and personal aspirations beyond rigid religious–secular binaries. Visual materials from participants’ wedding ceremonies, particularly photographs, were also examined as supplementary data. These images were treated not as transparent records but as cultural representations that aestheticize and frame the bridal body within ritualized celebration.

Data analysis followed an interpretive feminist approach attentive to women’s multiple and intersecting identities. Narratives were first examined as situated experiences of embodiment and aesthetic negotiation, and then read contextually through intersectionality to trace how religious norms, cultural expectations, gender roles, and the wedding industry converge to shape individual choices and constraints. Rather than seeking generalization, the analysis highlights how particular experiences illuminate broader discursive environments in which niqabi brides negotiate visibility, modesty, and beauty within a highly ritualized social space.

Pre-Wedding Negotiation in Bride of Tradition and Social impact

Within Banjarese Muslim society, weddings are *highly communal and performative events* rather than private celebrations. They are ritualized, time-bound moments of bodily display in which the bride’s appearance is publicly staged, evaluated, and remembered. Bridal makeup, costume, jewelry, and bodily comportment operate within high-stakes aesthetic regimes shaped by cultural expectations, religious norms, and the wedding industry. As a socially constructed “once-in-a-lifetime” event, the wedding intensifies gendered expectations of femininity and respectability, rendering the bride’s body unusually visible and morally charged.²¹

For niqabi brides, to be in the middle of religion and local discourse requires them to negotiate feminine identities. The gender order on feminine beautification is shaped through the construction of femininity. The construction of feminine or masculine identity, as argued by Butler, is built through repetitive performance.²² Although becoming a bride may happen only once or twice in a woman’s life, bridal femininity is cultivated long before marriage through repeated encounters with wedding ceremony, bridal imagery, family commentary, and communal expectations. The narrative of becoming a bride is continuously transmitted through the repetition of wedding practices across generations as part of collective memory. As Driscoll indicates, bridal culture offers normative meanings regarding how a bride should appear and behave.²³ In this sense, bridal femininity is learned over time through attending weddings, observing brides, listening to family commentary, and absorbing communal ideas about beauty and propriety. These repeated

²¹ Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, p. 71

²² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (routledge, 2002), 191.

²³ Emily Fairchild, “Examining Wedding Rituals through a Multidimensional Gender Lens: The Analytic

Importance of Attending to (In)Consistency,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 43, no. 3 (2014): 361.

encounters shape what a bride is imagined to be and how women come to see themselves as future brides.

Before and after wearing the niqab, every niqabi brides attended the wedding ceremony and saw how the practice of feminine beautification is set for the bride. Referring to the role as a bride as a set of repetitive feminine role, the niqabi-brides's experience of seeing a bride before they decided to wear the niqab is important to explore. Widuri and Shofwa described how seeing brides sparked imagination and planning long before marriage.

*Tantu ai kami ni sudah mambayangkan, ulun handak kayaini, ulun handak manjadi ratu, sudah ada bayangan kayapa tampilannya kena di nikahan ulun kaina.. siapakah tukang make-up nya, WO nya siapa jua?*²⁴

*Pastinya mun malihat tampilan make up pengantin, imbahtu mambandingkannya lawan muha biasa rajin, kaya barubah banar muha orang tu sampai kada kanal saking baubah banar dari muha nang kada ba make-up. Wanas Banar kah tu istilahnya, sampai urang tu batakun siapa WO nya, gasan referensi nikahan kena*²⁵

In attending the wedding ceremony, the two niqabi women are likely to imagine themselves in the bride's position. Widia projected herself incorporated into "we" and "I" while communicating her experience in seeing a bride. Asran and Udasmoro²⁶ exemplify how word choice, the language structure, is essential to see identity and one's subjectivity. "I" made the subject personal, having the intimate experience, while "we" reflected the subject's position merged with "we," in elaboration to

others. When using "we," Widuri projected her thought as a socially shared desire. The collective "we" situates her imagination within a broader female community. When Widuri changes the pronoun to be "I" in the following explanation, she emphasizes her perception of the self-desire to be a bride. "I want to be like this" means to be the bride's image in her memory. "I want to be the queen for one day" means to do the bride's role through the bride's image.

Meanwhile, Shofwa's statement does not emphasize any word that indicates the subject position (The "I" as personal or "we" as "I" that merge with "we") while once including "*Urang Banjar*" (the people of Banjar) in her statement. She said, —It was "*Wannas Banar*" (so stunningly beautiful) means that Urang Banjar used to say. The absence of "I" may reflect non-personal experience. Shofwa draws the realities that Urang Banjar calls the bride beautiful when the face is unrecognizably beautiful that her everyday face. Her mentioning of *Urang Banjar* inside her statement on seeing the bride describes that her subjectivity was concerning the community. So does the response that reflects the process of "imagining and projecting" - asking the makeup artist and the wedding organizer after seeing a beautiful bride- stand to be Shofwa's subjectivity incorporated to the general response after seeing the bride.

Here, *imagining* refers to how women form mental images of themselves as brides based on what they see in others, while *projecting* refers to how these images are carried forward into their own anticipated futures. This is not a private or purely internal process; it is socially cultivated through shared visual practices, collective language, and communal evaluations of beauty.

²⁴ "Widuri" (pseudonym), interview by author, Banjarmasin, March 5, 2021.

²⁵ "Shofwa" (pseudonym), interview by author, Banjarmasin, March 1, 2021.

²⁶ Asran and Udasmoro, "Konstruksi Identitas Niqabis Melalui Selfie Instagram."

Imagining and projecting thus describe how future-oriented selves are shaped long before marriage takes place.

It appears that the negotiation process between the niqabi women as "a bride to be" accentuates in "imagining and projecting." The process requires the woman to see the bride's image, and projected the outside images to themselves. This process of "imagining and projecting" begins early. Widuri recalled childhood memories of seeing brides as exceptionally beautiful, indicating how bridal desire is cultivated from girlhood. Weddings become pedagogical spaces where femininity is learned visually and affectively. While feminist critiques often frame such spectacles as reproducing patriarchal desire, Driscoll argues that for girls, bridal identification is not reducible to a desiring gaze but forms an affective relationship between girlhood and the imagined bride.²⁷ Weddings thus produce pleasure primarily for women and girls, for whom observing the bride is a meaningful ritual.

The process of "imagining and projecting" had given a glance that the negotiation process had occurred as the woman "wanting to be a bride." Before deciding to wear the niqab, attending various weddings gives a woman some projections of how the bride looks. A similar experience was confirmed by all the brides who were interviewed for this project. The projections of various images may bring a minor conflict in their personal decision to imagine what image they should choose once a lifetime occasion.

However, when niqabi-wearing women begin to use the niqab, these imagined bridal selves are ethically reworked through religious discipline. Drawing on Saba Mahmood's work,

this chapter understands religious practice not merely as obedience to rules or resistance to dominant norms, but as an active form of self-formation. Wearing the niqab involves cultivating particular bodily sensibilities—such as modesty, restraint, and moral attentiveness²⁸—that influence how women interpret visual display and beauty. As a result, the bridal images that once generated excitement or desire may later produce discomfort, sadness, or ethical hesitation.

The following section explores another form of negotiation by examining how niqabi brides negotiate in practice. Their negotiation behaviors vary across situations, at times reflecting avoidance strategies, acquiescent responses, or forms of relational negotiation grounded in mutual recognition and interpersonal harmony.²⁹ Understanding these negotiation patterns allows for a more nuanced reading of women's agency within ritual and religious contexts, where maintaining harmony and ethical relations may be valued as much as individual assertion. These dynamics demonstrate that negotiation is not merely a process of asserting personal interests, but also involves maintaining relationships, ethical commitments, and social balance. First negotiation on gendered negotiation behavior which appeared here is avoidance strategy. It's aligned with this statement which Haura elaborated when she attended the wedding, after she had used the niqab.

*Mun ulunlah, karna ulun sudah belajar batasan-batasan bahias, mun ulun melihat muha pangantin yang bamake-up tu, yang ditampilkan ka banyak orang, apalagi lawan nang lain mahram, ulun rasa sedih.*³⁰

²⁷ Driscoll, *Girls*, 187.

²⁸ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 23–26.

²⁹ Alice F. Stuhlmacher and Eileen Linnabery, "Gender and Negotiation: A Social Role Analysis," in *Handbook of*

Research on Negotiation, ed. Mara Olekalns and Wendi L. Adair (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013)..

³⁰ "Haura" (pseudonym), interview by author, Banjarmasin, March 1, 2021.

Haura does not directly indicate that she projected the bride's bodily display to herself. She just remarked that she was sad. The sad feeling was contradicted by the visual pleasure that is dominant to the other bride-to-be when seeing the bride. The absence of the pleasure made no result of "imagining and projecting" an image of a beautiful bride to herself. Although, the absence of "imagining and projecting," an image of a beautiful bride may indicate another form of imagining and projecting. Her perception reveals a new form of imagining the bride—one that prioritizes modesty and restraint rather than visual excess.

The sadness that Haura feels, reflects an ethical transformation shaped by religious discipline. Drawing on Mahmood, Hafsah's response should not be read as passive submission to religious norms but as the outcome of active moral cultivation. Considering her statement on women's limitation to show beauty, Hafsah's imagination of the bride should be the opposite, so is her projection of a bride.

This response is elaborated through Haura's ideal wedding occasion, where she wished to hold the small celebration. Hafsah is likely to realize that the bigger the occasion is, the more demand she would deal with concerning feminine beautification. As Otness and Peck (2003) mention, the lavish wedding creates a privilege for ordinary people to experience the experience of Elite.³¹ Applying this to the bride's role makes sense why the bride is dressed like the princess. As mentioned, the lavish wedding in South Kalimantan required a series of ceremonial acts where the bride must present in every single act with a different bodily display. In other words, the range of ceremonial acts only gives more pleasure to fulfilling the beauty demand.

Imagining going through those roles without any pleasure made Haura wish to have a small wedding celebration.

The above description concerning "imagining and projecting" had already described the negation behavior. It shows a negotiator (niqabi woman) developing a perception about the negotiator counterparts, negotiating with it, and making decisions. Haura's wish to hold the small wedding ceremony is based on her way of "imagining and projecting" the contradictory image of a beautiful bride on the glamour wedding with her identity as a niqabi woman. Here Haura imagine that the negotiator counterpart is the demand for being beautiful. Having a small wedding celebration is a negotiation outcome when she must not confront the need for feminine beautification required to the glamour wedding ceremony. This decision on negotiating can be categorized as an avoidance strategy. The avoidance strategy is the negotiator's strategy to ignore, withdraw or suppress resolving the negotiation³² Haura's wish to hold a small celebration is her strategy to avoid the demand for feminine beautification. This strategy redirects the use of power in negotiation. It implies that the need for being beautiful on the wedding occasion possesses' the high power, while Haura's position with the niqabi's identity poses' lower power.

The second strategy that reflects power is the acquiescence strategy, where the negotiator shows acceptance of the power imbalance.³³ After observing the demand for feminine beautification, Sofwa's decision to take off the niqab reflects that she used the acquiescence strategy. Sofwa explains that the bride's image with or without the niqab is likely similar because she found that the bride with the niqab

³¹ Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding* (Univ of California Press, 2003), 2:9.

³² Stuhlmacher and Linnabery, "Gender and Negotiation," 234.

³³ Stuhlmacher and Linnabery, "Gender and Negotiation."

still becomes attracted. Here, a concrete negotiator counterpart had not existed, but Sofwa developed a perception of a negotiator counterpart through her observation of the other niqabi brides. When she indicates that the beauty demand is so hegemonic, her decision to accept the beauty demand refers to the acquiescence strategy, based on her position as a niqabi woman who possesses little power.

The negotiation process on "imagining and projecting" is later continued to the concrete negotiation, which involves family and society. The "outside" involvement concerning bodily display in the wedding emphasizes that the bodily display during the wedding does not belong independently to the bride. The next bride, Widuri, elaborates how she involves the parent in negotiation.

*Amun mamakai cadar, magun jua orang kada malihat. Imbahtu dipikir-pikir lagi, ulun takuni kuitan. Ujar kuitan, amun baju Banjar tu kada bacadar pang, karna mukanya harus kalihatan. Jadi ulun pakai cadar di baju akad aja.*³⁴

When Widuri compares her imagined image of a bride with her identity as a niqabi woman, negotiation begins. Her concern that "people would not see" reflects an awareness that the niqab might obscure the bridal beauty expected in the ceremony. By involving her parents, Widuri acknowledges that bridal bodily display does not belong solely to the bride but is shaped by family authority and inherited tradition. This move opens space for negotiating discursive expectations rather than confronting them directly. Her parents, recognizing her niqabi identity, offer a compromise that allows her to wear the niqab with a non-traditional

wedding dress. This negotiation shows that decisions about bridal appearance are socially constructed and shared rather than individually owned. Widuri's engagement with her parents also reflects a feminist understanding of negotiation as relational and grounded in mutual recognition.³⁵ By inviting her parents into the decision-making process, she reasserts her identity as a niqabi woman while acknowledging their authority. The resulting agreement demonstrates that negotiation is achieved not through domination but through connectedness and shared understanding.³⁶

All three of the negotiation patterns above, are part of niqabi wearing negotiation before their body being displayed. What is needed to be considered here, that negotiation did not stop. During the public appearance, series of negotiate re-happened, and it varies according to what those niqabi-wearing decided to display. While Amalia decided to take off her niqab and prefer the light makeup, Shofwa took off the niqab while choosing to wear the bold and take off the niqab. Haura, Widuri, Ghea, and Laili wear the niqab on, only that Widuri differentiates her use of niqab in adjustment to wedding costume.

By seeing the niqabi's negotiation concerning the bodily display before the wedding, it appears that they had established their relationship with structures of social authority and determine their projection of what are they, what they want, and what kind of work they perform on themselves to realize a particular modality of being a bride during the bodily display. Therefore, the second negotiation, which manifests during bodily display, can also be seen as the outcome of the previous negotiation.

³⁴ "Widuri" (pseudonym), interview by author, Banjarmasin, March 5, 2021.

³⁵ Linda L. Putnam and Deborah M. Kolb, "Rethinking Negotiation: Feminist Views of Communication and

Exchange," (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States), 2000, 2, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452225494.n4>.

³⁶ Putnam and Kolb, "Rethinking Negotiation," 2.

Examining the Bodily Display: Bodily Negotiation During the Wedding

While the previous section has shown how niqabi women imagine and negotiate their identities before the wedding, the ceremony itself introduces a different set of conditions. The wedding is not only a symbolic culmination of prior decisions, but also a moment in which those decisions are tested, adjusted, and sometimes reworked in real time. During the ceremony, the bride's body becomes publicly visible within a structured sequence of rituals, each carrying specific expectations of appearance, comportment, and participation.³⁷

In this setting, negotiation no longer occurs primarily at the level of imagination or anticipation. Instead, it unfolds through bodily display—through how the bride dresses, moves, reveals, conceals, and responds to the gaze of others. These moments are shaped not only by prior decisions but also by immediate social interactions, situational pressures, and the presence of multiple audiences, including family members, guests, and non-mahram men. As a result, bodily display during the wedding becomes a site of ongoing negotiation, where earlier ethical commitments encounter the demands of public performance.

There are at least three patterns in which Niqabi brides negotiate their bodily display during a wedding. The first pattern is *Selective Veiling*. One aspect that reflects the experiences of niqabi brides is their awareness of veiling as part of their bodily display during the wedding ceremony. This awareness emerges from the

transformation of their everyday appearance into a ceremonial appearance, as weddings culturally mark a transition from one stage of life to another and redefine both social and personal identity.³⁸ For niqabi brides, however, this transformation involves a particular tension. Although many of them have internalized ideals of the “beautiful bride” since childhood, their commitment to covering the face creates a complex negotiation between religious modesty and bridal aesthetics.

This experience contrasts with the pleasure and excitement promoted by the beauty industry, which offers extensive forms of bridal enhancement through makeup, clothing, adornment, and styling. As wedding industries increasingly adapt to Muslim consumers, more options have become available to accommodate veiled brides, including niqabi brides. Heavy and glamorous makeup is no longer the only bridal preference promoted to Muslim women. Many wedding vendors now offer “natural” wedding looks that are considered more compatible with Islamic ideals of modesty.

In Islamic wedding ceremony, the required ritual of marriage is *akad*. The *akad* consists of *ijab* (words of delivery) pronounced by the *wali* and *kabul* (words of acceptance) pronounced by the groom or his representative in the presence of two witnesses.³⁹ According to Islamic correspondence, *akad* is suggested to be followed by *walimah*, a feast that invites friends and relatives to announce the marriage.⁴⁰ In Banjarese wedding ceremonies, both *akad* and *walimah* have their own distinctive bridal gown and adornment. The ceremony also accompanied by traditional ritual performances, thus the bride

³⁷ Allison Vandenberg, “Toward a Phenomenological Analysis of Historicized Beauty Practices,” *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2018): 170–71, <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/90/article/690847/summary>.

³⁸ Duran Bell, “Defining Marriage and Legitimacy,” *Current Anthropology* 38, no. 2 (1997): 246, <https://doi.org/10.1086/204606>.

³⁹ Arskal Salim and Azyumardi Azra, eds., *Shari'a and Politics in Modern Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003). 279.

⁴⁰ See Al-Bani, *Ringkasan Shahih Bukhari*, Jakarta: Gema Insani (2008).

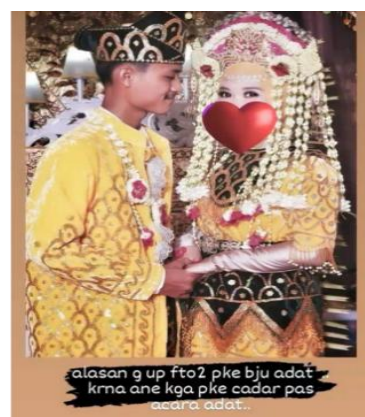
often dress with traditional local costumes and adornment. These ceremonial practices reflect the Banjarese sense of cultural belonging. As Forshee notes, many Indonesians remain strongly attached to their ethnicity and local customs, often resisting simplified or inauthentic versions of traditional attire.⁴¹ In the Banjarese context, Islam as a transcultural religion has interacted with local culture to form a distinctly Islamic ethnic identity.⁴² The cultural significance of these traditions, alongside processes of Islamization, has also shaped the wedding industry's construction of the "ideal Islamic bride" within Banjarese society. One visible adjustment lies in veiling practices. What distinguishes the Islamic bridal appearance from more secular wedding styles is its emphasis on covering parts of the *awrat* that would otherwise remain visible, such as the hair and parts of the body.

For niqabi brides such as Widuri, attachment to local culture influenced her decision to adopt a more traditional wedding costume, even though she felt that it did not fully align with the niqab. She explained:

*Di nikahan ulun, ulun handak makai baju adat Banjar babujur. Ulun kada tatarik mamakai yang bamodifikasi karna nilainya lain lawan nang asli. Nah gasan manyasuaikan, jadinya pakai manset tangan lawan gulu karna baju aslinya kan tabuka bagian situ. Mun karudungnya dasar kada panjang karna kan sudah ada cape-nya yang sudah manutup data.*⁴³

For Widuri, wearing the traditional wedding dress was important because, as she

stated, "The *syari'at* (religion) must be actualized while culture must be respected." By maintaining this principle, at her wedding ceremony, Widuri accommodated the traditional costume as part of her identity as a Banjarese bride. Through her preference for the original traditional attire, she established a visual connection to the cultural past. Although most parts of the body were covered through additional inner garments, the face remained visible. Widuri was aware that traditional Banjarese bridal aesthetics involved specific facial makeup and head adornments. She understood that wearing the "royal" traditional wedding costume also required ritual preparation. Before the marriage ceremony, she therefore performed the ritual of *bamandi-mandi*, a ceremonial bridal bath intended to prepare the bride physically and spiritually to wear the royal costume.



Picture 1. Widuri without Niqab with traditional wedding dress.

During the *akad* ceremony, Widuri chose to wear the niqab together with her Muslim wedding gown. However, when wearing the traditional wedding costume, she removed the

⁴¹ Jill Forshee, *Culture and Customs of Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Greenwood, 2006), 147, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798400635434>.

⁴² Mary Hawkins, "Becoming Banjar: Identity and Ethnicity in South Kalimantan, Indonesia," *Asia Pacific*

Journal of Anthropology, ahead of print, 2000, 30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442210010001705830>.

⁴³ "Widuri" (pseudonym), interview by author, Banjarmasin, March 5, 2021

niqab and adapted herself to the conventional bridal appearance. This decision emerged through discussion with her parents. Although her parents permitted her to wear the niqab during parts of the wedding ceremony, they suggested that she remove it when wearing the traditional dress, since the costume conventionally requires the bride's face to remain visible. Widuri did not describe this suggestion as coercive, as she herself understood the cultural expectations surrounding traditional bridal attire.



Picture 2. Widuri in her akad dress with niqab

Selective veiling is thus emerges as a negotiated practice rather than a complete rejection of either religious modesty or cultural tradition. Widuri was able to determine which forms of veiling and adornment aligned with both her own preferences and those of her family. Her position as a niqabi bride entering a wedding ceremony rich in local tradition did not prevent her from maintaining the niqab in one part of the ceremony while choosing not to wear it in another.

It is also interesting to note that, with the emergence of social media, the display of the bride's body has reappeared through the bride's own self-representation. On their Instagram

accounts, brides selectively choose which photographs to share. In Widuri's Instagram account, for example, a photograph of her wearing traditional bridal attire without a niqab (Picture 1) is partially covered with a heart-shaped sticker. This suggests that she is aware of social media as a public space and deliberately conceals part of her image, re-doing selective veiling and re-negotiating between public visibility and her commitment to modesty.

Other brides, such as Haura, Ghea, and Laili, chose to maintain the niqab throughout all stages of their wedding ceremonies. Their experiences were shaped by the growing wedding industry that increasingly accommodates the preferences of niqabi brides. However, these accommodations perhaps have become widely available only within the last five years in Banjar community. Haura, who married in 2016, recalled the difficulty of finding a wedding gown that matched both her preference for loose clothing and her commitment to the niqab. In contrast, Ghea and Laili, who married in 2024 and 2025, were able to find wedding gowns and adorned niqabs more easily, often already coordinated with the overall bridal theme. Ghea, for example, was able to rent a Turkish-style wedding gown that matched her aesthetic preferences.



Picture 3. Ghea with Turkish style costume as her reference with Niqabi bridal theme

These developments demonstrate how the increasing visibility of veiled bridal fashion has transformed contemporary wedding culture. Although the veil forms only one aspect of wedding customs, the religious meanings associated with veiling, together with influences from Middle Eastern fashion and aesthetics, have contributed to significant transformations in contemporary Muslim wedding ceremony.

These developments demonstrate that niqabi brides are not merely passive participants within dominant bridal beauty culture. Despite the strong emphasis placed on the bride's face as the visual center of the wedding ceremony, niqabi brides, through their commitment to veiling and their awareness of beautification practices, are able to reposition themselves within these aesthetic expectations. Their presence redirects dominant standards of bridal beauty by showing that bridal attractiveness and elegance do not necessarily depend upon full facial visibility. In this sense, niqabi brides participate in reshaping the meaning of bridal appearance itself, negotiating alternative forms of beauty that emphasize modesty alongside adornment.

At the same time, this transformation is closely connected to the logic of the beauty and wedding industry. As the market increasingly seeks to accommodate diverse forms of Muslim femininity, wedding vendors have expanded their services to include styles suitable for niqabi brides. In the era of globalization and the mass media, it is very difficult to set aside the discursive contemporary consumption of ritual in the wedding ceremony. Various Wedding

vendors and makeup artists are now entering the mass media, adjusting the local wedding custom to the recent trend of global beauty industries. Therefore, a wedding is not only demonstrated in the cultural and religious sphere, but also the sociological and economic significance of consumer culture.⁴⁴

Second pattern is Spatial Regulation. The negotiations undertaken by niqabi brides during the wedding ceremony are not limited to decisions about beautification or veiling practices, but also extend to the regulation of space itself. Within the highly performative setting of the wedding, space functions as an important mechanism through which bodily visibility is organized and controlled. As Fairchild argues, wedding rituals are structured through gendered conventions that exaggerate masculinity and femininity, including through the arrangement of ceremonial space and bodily display. In this setting, the bride's body becomes highly regulated within spatial practices that position her as the visual center of the ritual.⁴⁵ However, wedding also become woman-defined space which identified the woman's goal and achievement in communal feminine beautifying. It draws a specific experience within common or everyday beauty practices and argues for feminist subjectivity in the process of beautification.⁴⁶ Within this framework, who define space matters and reflect power, which is important in feminist theory of subjectivity.

In most Indonesian weddings, including wedding in Banjar society, spatial boundaries exist and differentiate between public and private areas, male and female guests, backstage preparation rooms, and ceremonial stages. In

⁴⁴ Özlem Sandikci and B. Ece İlhan, "Dowry: A Cherished Possession or an Old-Fashioned Tradition in a Modernizing Society?," in *Contemporary Consumption Rituals* (Psychology Press, 2004), 150.

⁴⁵ Fairchild, "Examining Wedding Rituals through a Multidimensional Gender Lens," 365.

⁴⁶ Ann J. Cahill, "Feminist Pleasure and Feminine Beautification," *Hypatia* 18, no. 4 (2003): 60, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/hypatia/article/feminist-pleasure-and-feminine-beautification/6DA693D196450C1F1681460CF58B6876>.

common, backstage preparation rooms are exclusive to woman, and this where Cahill's theory of feminist pleasure could work, it exclude the 'male gaze' and create woman-defined space.⁴⁷ But when it come to ceremonial stage, male and female guest are usually mingled. In Islam, special regulation matters and strictly ruled. It's also structured the physicals space in religious place such as the mosque or religious gathering where male and female sits are differentiate. A wedding ceremony in Indonesia, though it was also a religious celebration, also a cultural so the space regulation between male and female are not ruled as strict in a pure religious gathering.

For niqabi brides, these spatial arrangements become essential in managing the tension between the religious commitment to modesty and the ritual demand for bridal visibility. Rather than fully withdrawing from the ceremony or fully submitting to dominant bridal aesthetics, participants negotiated visibility by regulating where, before whom, and under what circumstances certain forms of bodily display could occur. This visible regulation occurs fully in the late niqabi wedding, Ghea who married in 2025. Her wedding ceremony creates different space for female and male guest. Only her male family (mahram) could see the bride, so it reduces the 'male gaze' which could see and become external impose expectation to female body.

During the interview, alongside the other brides, all the niqabi brides understand the concept of male gaze religiously, as it becomes

clearly common motive for avoiding male desires through eyes of seeing a beautiful face.⁴⁸ However, when it comes to the discourse of beauty, while the male gaze is understood as an externally imposed expectation upon the female body, the niqabi brides did not explicitly frame their practices within a feminist conception of non-coercive beauty. Nevertheless, their religiously motivated restriction of male spectators indirectly created a more female-centered space of beautification. In this sense, unlike regular wedding ceremonies where the possibility of feminist pleasure in beautification, as discussed by Cahill, may remain limited to backstage or preparation spaces before the bride enters public display, spatial regulation in niqabi weddings opens greater possibilities for female-centered beautification. By controlling spectatorship and bodily visibility within the ceremony itself, niqabi brides were able to strengthen their own subjectivity over bodily display rather than positioning it primarily for mixed public consumption.

The possibility of regulating bodily visibility to this extent was also shaped by social and familial background. Ghea came from a niqabi family environment, and her husband's family similarly supported the niqab, allowing spatial regulation to be more fully implemented within the wedding ceremony. This suggests that social support significantly influences how far niqabi brides are able to negotiate and control bodily display. By contrast, participants who came from non-niqabi family backgrounds often faced narrower space for negotiation due to

⁴⁷ In her writing, "Feminist Pleasure and Feminine Beautification" how feminine beautification may become a more woman-centered experience when conducted within female spaces that minimize the presence of the male gaze. She argues that the exclusion of male spectators allows beautification to be experienced more as a practice shaped by women's own desires, judgments,

and comfort rather than primarily through externally imposed expectations.

⁴⁸ When it comes to individual motives for wearing the niqab, each niqabi bride discussed here describes different reasons shaped by her own circumstances. However, the notion of beauty, and its strong relation to desire, is understood as an aspect to which all of them could relate.

differing familial expectations and ceremonial norms. Nevertheless, this did not eliminate their agency; rather, their negotiations operated within more limited and constrained conditions.

For example, Laili (who married in 2024) could not fully regulate the wedding space by separating male and female guests due to familial and social circumstances. Nevertheless, she negotiated visibility by treating the niqab itself as a form of personal space and boundary. Through the niqab, she maintained control over what remained visible and what was concealed, allowing her to exercise beautification within the protected space of her own subjectivity rather than entirely through public display.

However, for niqabi brides, the concern was not limited to the visibility of the face, which could be concealed by the niqab. Other demands also involved displaying the bride's body through the wedding gown, jewelry, and bridal attire. One niqabi bride, Haura, explicitly expressed this concern, explaining that the ornaments attached to the bride's body were themselves forms of beautification that should not be displayed before non-mahram men.⁴⁹ In this sense, the niqab alone could not fully function as a space for controlling women's bodily agency. Niqabi brides therefore continued to negotiate various forms of beautification pressure within the wedding ceremony. When the ideal spatial arrangement was difficult to achieve and they found themselves in constrained social conditions, reinterpretations of beautification became necessary.

The third pattern of the negotiation is the reinterpretations of Feminine Beautification. Feminine beautification in Islam, as mentioned above, coexists with normative frameworks regulating women's appearance through concepts such as *'awra and tabarruj*, which have

been variously interpreted across time and place. Relating the niqabis' experiences to authoritative interpretations of *'awra and tabarruj*, particularly within situational contexts such as weddings, requires attention to how religious norms are negotiated within specific social and ritual settings. In this context, the wedding becomes a space where ideals of modesty, beautification, visibility, and religious commitment intersect, requiring niqabi brides to reinterpret the values within themselves as niqabi woman.

In the ordinary settings of the niqabi brides' everyday lives, interpretations of *tabarruj*—which can be broadly understood as the public display of the body, beauty, or adornment—are more easily aligned with everyday lives, where they have their own space, in the family or familiar environment where less cultural and social expectation demanded. In that scheme, niqab becomes not merely an identity marker, but also a bodily practice that, as Saba Mahmood argues, does not simply signify adherence to particular norms but actively contributes to the construction of the self. It reflects a form of “pious self-cultivation” achieved through bodily discipline and the ongoing “crafting” of the ethical subject.⁵⁰

My argument, in alignment with Mahmood, is that when occur a situation where the physical identity of the niqab is removed or its function is reduced—such as during the wedding ceremony—the process of pious self-cultivation continues to operate through ethical negotiations over visibility, beautification, and bodily display. In this sense, modesty is not located solely in the material presence of the niqab itself, but also in the embodied consciousness and moral discipline through which niqabi brides regulate and reinterpret their

⁴⁹ Haura” (pseudonym), interview by author, Banjarmasin, March 1, 2021.

⁵⁰ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 60.

representation (bodily display or appearance) within constrained ritual conditions.

In the discourse of feminist study, all niqabi brides have shown their concern of bodily display during the wedding. This concern shows consciousness in beauty discourse, where notion of pleasure and coercion often mingled and obscure the line in the endless question of woman's subjectivity of their bodily display. This consciousness reflects in how a niqabi bride interpret the authoritative concept of *tabarruj* as below.

*Sabagai binian, ulun pastinya bisi kainginan dipandang baguslah di hadapan lakian. Tapi ulun sadar bahwa kahandak itu sabujurnya kada sasuai lawan yang diajarkan agama. Pas ulun pakai cadarni, ulun marasa kahandak itu kurang lah hudah bahkan bisa sampai kadada lagi rasa handa kalihatan bungas tadi. Kanapa? karna pas ulun handak makai pupur misalnya leh, sakira muhatu taputih, atau pakai gincu sakira..., intinya bamake-up, ingat saurang ni bacadar jua maapa pakai itu, kada kalihatan jua kayaitu nah, jadi sadar kalau itu kada perlu, kan kada kalihatan jua. Ulun paham cadar itu kada wajib gasan binian dalam Islam, tapi mamakai cadar ni jalan ulun gasan mangontorol niat yang kada baik itu.*⁵¹

This statement remarks the ineluctable relationship between Amalia and her bodily behavior of using the niqab with specific Islamic moral code. For Amalia, she is aware of her position as a woman within the Islamic moral code while also aware of her instinct to be seen as a beautiful woman. Her awareness of the male gaze also significant. Therefore, in her decision

to wear the niqab, she performs an act of concealing "the beauty" by the Islamic moral code which she prefers to believe rather than fulfilling her instinct. The beauty practices which are associated with the artificial beauty attributes to the face (such as putting powder, lipstick, or other make-up) according to her remark, are included as the acts of *tabarruj*.

During her wedding ceremony in 2018, Amalia was encouraged by neighbors and family members to remove her niqab because weddings are considered a once-in-a-lifetime occasion. Although she believed that facial make-up could be categorized as *tabarruj* and one of her reasons for wearing the niqab was to avoid such beautification, she felt uncomfortable refusing the request, especially since her family and neighbors had contributed greatly to the wedding preparations. Amalia held her wedding ceremony in the village where niqab is still seen as foreign in the community. Amalia explained that insisting on her personal preference would feel inappropriate within the communal village setting, where weddings are treated as shared social events.

As a committed niqabi, Amalia had the option to maintain her niqab during the ceremony, yet she chose to accommodate communal expectations. She requested only soft bridal make-up and reassured herself that her intention was not to attract attention. At the same time, she privately sought God's forgiveness in case her decision was sinful. Although she did not initially prioritize beauty standards, she admitted enjoying her bridal appearance and feeling beautiful in the make-up and dress. However, she also became aware that her beautified appearance would be seen by non-kin men, leading her to reinterpret the purpose of her beautification as something intended primarily to

⁵¹ Amalia(pseudonym), interview by author, Banjarmasin on February 27th 2021

please her husband. Drawing on Cahill's argument, feminine beautification may produce aesthetic pleasure when experienced by women as embodied subjects rather than objects of others' gaze. For Amalia, the pleasure of seeing herself as beautiful existed alongside discomfort once she realized that her appearance would also become visible to and evaluated by others, particularly men.

A similar situation also occurred with Laili (married in 2024), who held her wedding within a communal community setting. What differs is that, by 2024, the appearance of niqabi brides had become more frequent, especially through mass media, niqabi influencers, and wedding organizers that accommodate niqabi weddings. As a result, Laili could easily find wedding references as a niqabi bride; she was able to request a niqab that aligned with her wedding gown and choose a looser dress that accommodated her style preference. Although she did not explicitly mention *tabarruj*, it is interesting that Laili frequently referred to *malu*, which means "shyness." In Islamic moral conduct, shyness is encouraged for both men and women, as it is mentioned that Prophet Muhammad is the highest example of shyness.⁵² However, women are more encouraged to do so because the culturally accepted notion is that women are naturally shy.⁵³

In the Indonesian context, *malu* does not merely describe an emotional response but also functions as a moral and social regulation. As Johan Lindquist argues, *malu* connotes not only shame or embarrassment, but also piety and modesty. In this sense, *malu* becomes an ongoing

engagement with social ideals, encouraging women to continuously guard their behavior and bodily appearance in order to avoid disgrace.⁵⁴ The effect of *malu* is therefore disciplinary, shaping women's subjectivity even without direct external surveillance. One of frequent expression that Laili describe is shyness. One that is related to her dramatic makeup change in the wedding, she elaborated:

*Kaya memang, kayapa yo ka, misal urang lain malihat kaya lain dah pokoknya, kan biasa bacadar, kaya orang lain kaya supan, saat itu...*⁵⁵

Relating this to Laili's experience, her emphasis on shyness reflects not merely a personal feeling, but also an internalized moral framework through which feminine appearance, bodily visibility, and religious commitment are continuously negotiated. In this sense, the notion of beauty is closely connected to shyness, which connotes modesty. The concept of modesty is also strongly associated with women and the practice of veiling, although its meaning varies among Muslim women. As Saba Mahmood explains, some Muslim women closely associate modesty with wearing the veil, others understand it as a general human virtue, while some interpret it as a way of avoiding the male gaze.⁵⁶ In the Indonesian context, modesty is not only associated with moral conduct, but also with modern Muslim womanhood. As weddings stand as occasions celebrated simultaneously by society, religion, culture, and the marketplace, niqabi brides manage their pious self-cultivation

⁵² Bukhari and Muslim. See Riyad al-Salihin, 364, Kitab al-adab, bab al-haya' wa fadlulu.

⁵³ Dr Muhammad Ali Al-Hashimi, *The IDEAL MUSLIMAH The True Islamic Personality of the Muslim Woman as Defined in the Qur'an and Sunnah*, n.d., 39.

⁵⁴ Monika Arnez, "Gender, Islam and Sexuality in Contemporary Indonesia: An Overview," in *Gender,*

Islam and Sexuality in Contemporary Indonesia, ed. Monika Arnez and Melani Budianta (Springer Nature, 2024), 152, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-5659-3_1.

⁵⁵ Laili (pseudonym), interview by author, Banjarmasin on April 3rd 2026

⁵⁶ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.

through bodily display during the wedding, making the ceremony a stage for negotiating and reinterpreting these different aspects.

Conclusion

The experiences of niqabi brides in South Kalimantan demonstrate that weddings function as ritual spaces where modesty, feminine beautification, cultural expectations, and social relations intersect. Rather than fully resisting or conforming to dominant bridal beauty norms, niqabi brides continuously negotiate their identities before and during the wedding through selective unveiling, spatial regulation, and the reinterpretation of beautification practices. The findings further reveal that the niqab is not merely a religious symbol but an integral part of an ongoing process of pious self-cultivation. Even when the niqab is temporarily removed or adjusted during the wedding ceremony, ethical concerns regarding visibility, modesty, shyness, and bodily display continue to shape how participants understand themselves as pious Muslim women. In this sense, modesty resides not only in the physical veil but also in the moral consciousness through which niqabi brides negotiate their appearance within ritual settings. At the same time, bridal bodily display is not solely an individual choice but is shaped by family authority, communal expectations, religious norms, and local wedding traditions. Nevertheless, the participants exercised agency through negotiation, compromise, and reinterpretation, demonstrating their capacity to navigate multiple and often competing moral, emotional, and social demands. Ultimately, this study argues that the experiences of niqabi brides cannot be reduced to simplistic binaries such as oppression versus liberation or tradition versus modernity; instead, they illustrate the dynamic ways in which Muslim women actively construct and negotiate piety, femininity, and social

identity within the highly visible and culturally significant space of the wedding ceremony.

References

- Adrian, Bonnie. *Framing The Bride: Globalizing Beauty And Romance In Taiwan's Bridal Industry*. University Of California Press, 2003.
- Al-Hashimi, Dr Muhammdad Ali. *The Ideal Muslimah The True Islamic Personality Of The Muslim Woman As Defined In The Qur'an And Sunnah*. N.D.
- Arnez, Monika. "Gender, Islam And Sexuality In Contemporary Indonesia: An Overview." In *Gender, Islam And Sexuality In Contemporary Indonesia*, Edited By Monika Arnez And Melani Budianta. Springer Nature, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-5659-3_1.
- Asran, Diana Safinda, And Wening Udasmoro. "Konstruksi Identitas Niqabis Melalui Selfie Instagram." *Jurnal Kawistara* 10, No. 2 (2020): 159. <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=76837675>.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity And Domination: Studies In The Phenomenology Of Oppression*. Routledge, 2015. <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/books/Mono/Download?Identifiername=Doi&Identifiervalue=10.4324/9780203825259&Type=Googlepdf>.
- Beauvoir, Simone De. "The Second Sex." In *Social Theory Re-Wired*, 3rd Ed. Routledge, 2023.
- Bell, Duran. "Defining Marriage And Legitimacy." *Current Anthropology* 38, No. 2 (1997): 237–53. <https://doi.org/10.1086/204606>.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2002. <https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/B>

- ooks/Mono/Download?Identifiername=Do
i&Identifiervalue=10.4324/978020390275
2&Type=Googlepdf.
- Cahill, Ann J. "Feminist Pleasure And Feminine Beautification." *Hypatia* 18, No. 4 (2003): 42–64.
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/hypatia/article/feminist-pleasure-and-feminine-beautification/6da693d196450c1f1681460cf58b6876>.
- Driscoll, Catherine. *Girls: Feminine Adolescence In Popular Culture And Cultural Theory*. Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Fairchild, Emily. "Examining Wedding Rituals Through A Multidimensional Gender Lens: The Analytic Importance Of Attending To (In)Consistency." *Journal Of Contemporary Ethnography* 43, No. 3 (2014): 361–89.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241613497750>.
- Felski, Rita. *Doing Time: Feminist Theory And Postmodern Culture*. Nyu Press, 2000.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfmxxg>.
- Forshee, Jill. *Culture And Customs Of Indonesia*. 1st Ed. Greenwood, 2006.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9798400635434>.
- Hawkins, Mary. "Becoming Banjar: Identity And Ethnicity In South Kalimantan, Indonesia." *Asia Pacific Journal Of Anthropology*, Ahead Of Print, 2000.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14442210010001705830>.
- Lailaturohmah, Riza, Eka Prasetiawati, And Ikhwanuddin Ikhwanuddin. "The Meaning Of Tabarruj In The Perspective Of Indonesian Mufasirs (Schleiermacher Hermeneutics Analysis)." *International Journal Of Research* 1, No. 2 (2023): 191–212.
<http://ojs.iainsumbar.ac.id/index.php/ijr/article/view/341>.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Politics Of Piety: The Islamic Revival And The Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Meyrasyawati, Dewi. "Fesyen Dan Identitas: Simbolisasi Budaya Dan Agama Dalam Busana Pengantin Jawa Muslim Di Surabaya." *Makara Human Behavior Studies In Asia* 17, No. 2 (2013): 99.
<https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v17i2.2955>.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islamic Art And Spirituality*. Suny Press, 1987.
<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=H5pzli-7v9ec&oi=fnd&pg=pp11&dq=Islamic+Art+and+spirituality&ots=Yjkgknippjy&sig=V6flklInvdydn6xow6mrpbj9jcl0>.
- Otnes, Cele C., And Elizabeth Pleck. *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure Of The Lavish Wedding*. Vol. 2. Univ Of California Press, 2003.
- Piela, Anna. *Wearing The Niqab: Muslim Women In The Uk And The Us*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.
- Putnam, Linda L., And Deborah M. Kolb. "Rethinking Negotiation: Feminist Views Of Communication And Exchange." (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States), 2000, 76–104.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452225494.N4>.
- Sandikci, Özlem, And B. Ece İlhan. "Dowry: A Cherished Possession Or An Old-Fashioned Tradition In A Modernizing Society?" In *Contemporary Consumption Rituals*. Psychology Press, 2004.
- Sharify-Funk, Meena. "Governing The Face Veil: Quebec's Bill 94 And The

- Transnational Politics Of Women's Identity." *International Journal Of Canadian Studies*, No. 43 (2011): 135–63.
<https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ijcs/2011-N43-Ijcs0122/1009458ar/abstract/>.
- Smith-Hefner, Nancy J. *Islamizing Intimacies: Youth, Sexuality, And Gender In Contemporary Indonesia*. University Of Hawaii Press, 2019.
- Stuhlmacher, Alice F., And Eileen Linnabery. "Gender And Negotiation: A Social Role Analysis." In *Handbook Of Research On Negotiation*, Edited By Mara Olekalns And Wendi L. Adair. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013.
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781005903.00018>.
- Tarwiyah, Siti. "Perkembangan Dan Tantangan Sosial Kehidupan Perempuan Salafi Di Kalimantan Selatan." *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 15, No. 2 (2018): 470–492.
<https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v15i2.533>.
- "The Popular Face-Veil In Indonesia: The Quest For The New Meanings." Accessed May 15, 2026.
- Vandenberg, Allison. "Toward A Phenomenological Analysis Of Historicized Beauty Practices." *Wsq: Women's Studies Quarterly* 46, No. 1 (2018): 167–80.
<https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/90/article/690847/summary>.
- Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images Of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. Random House, 2013.