

THE GLOBAL EMERGENCE OF MUSLIM FASHION

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Despite the Muslim community having received an onslaught of prejudice in the current climate, designers, retailers and brands alike are bringing a fresh perspective as they tap into the 'modest fashion' phenomenon.

Indonesian-based designer **Anniesa Hasibuan** is a prime example. She made history during the S/S 17 New York Fashion Week shows as the first designer to send all her models down the runway wearing hijabs. She returned for A/W 17 with a similar agenda. At the latest NYFW, hijabs were also spotted in the catwalk show by **YEEZY**, Kanye West's much-discussed label.

DKNY took a stake in modest fashion in 2014 with 'Ramadan,' a capsule collection offering conservative pants, blouses, skirts and dresses. In the following years, high fashion labels, such as **Oscar de La Renta**, as well as high street giants, including **Zara** and **Mango**, have put out similar collections. Some critics, however, have questioned their relevance.



Anniesa Hasibuan

Much of the criticism focuses on practicality and/or lack of cultural sensitivity. Thus, pieces with high slits or low-cut details that can be found in these lines are inappropriate for Ramadan. Besides, the clientele for these collections is often looking for occasion-wear, not casual outfits. In addition, religious fashion is a controversial subject: in the UK, customers threatened to boycott **Marks & Spencer** for its S/S 16 range of so-called "burkinis", full-cover swimsuits. Despite the backlash, that collection sold out. Finally, collections targeted at the Islamic market are sold primarily in the Middle East, where only 20% of the world's Muslim population is based.

To buy into this emerging market it's strategic to look West, an underserved region with an estimated 100 billion USD spending power amongst Muslims. This season, major UK retailer **Debenhams** announced plans to offer the hijab, and **Tommy Hilfiger** continues to be a prominent figure on the modest fashion market. If brands and retailers focus on cultural understanding and elevated products the outcome can benefit both their business and fashion's diversity.