

Article

# Mattering Moralities: Learning Corporeal Modesty through Muslim Diasporic Clothing Practices

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**Abstract:** Questions of ‘coveredness’ in Islamic codes of dress, particularly as they apply to women, are often framed through the symbolic statements that they enable or disable, or through discourses on public versus private spaces. Rather than focus on these disciplining dimensions, this article explores observations about embodied practices for clothing oneself ‘modestly’, and some of the paradoxes thereof, which emerged in the context of research about diasporic mobilities of European-Moroccans in Morocco. Drawing heavily on Karen Barad and a materialist phenomenological approach to corporeality, this approach produces an understanding of how moral bodies materialize with and through clothing. By observing and following the mobilities of participants across spaces dominated by ‘Muslim’ and ‘Western’ regimes of modesty, certain dissonances of their practices in these differentiated spaces indicate ways bodies, clothing and moralities are intra-actively entangled. Proposing ethnography as a diffractive apparatus, the analysis incorporates participant reports, as well as embodied learning through ethnographic time. By approaching this ‘disciplining’ diffractively, all agents–knowledgeable bodies, malleable clothes and spatially moral gazes—are considered as intra-actively influencing each other, mattering into ‘modesty’ where ‘subjected’ bodies, as well as clothing and regimes of modesty are adapting.

**Keywords:** Barad; corporeality; shame; phenomenology; intra-action; diffraction; Islam; Morocco; ethnography; embodiment

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## 1. Introduction: Feeling Covered

The extract of talk represented in Box 1 comes from an interview between myself, Anissa and Shirin, which took place in a cafe in Den Haag, Netherlands. Anissa and Shirin are longtime friends and Dutch-Moroccans; they were recruited for participation for this ethnographic research about European Moroccans visiting Morocco when I asked them for directions while they were on a pleasure trip in Marrakech. We met again several months later, when we were all ‘back home’ in Europe, from Morocco.

In the context of research about diasporic negotiations of belonging in Morocco, I asked them about wearing djellabas, a loose-fitting, dress-like silhouette that is worn, with many variations in color, style and decoration, by both men and women in Morocco. This question addressed style practices around an object (djellaba) that is widely understood as indexing ‘Moroccanness’. Some Moroccans who have lived most or all of their lives in Europe wear a djellaba as everyday clothing, in Europe or in Morocco. Anissa and Shirin, evidently, do not. Yet, Shirin’s unusually complex answer as to why she does not usually wear them was an exceptional elicitation of how European Moroccans visiting Morocco might experience their bodies and clothing.

**Box 1.** Interview extract: Walking in a djellaba<sup>1</sup>.

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Anissa and Shirin, Den Haag 10 April 2008, 1m

- 1 LW do you ever wear djellabas and things like that there? or do-  
 2 S there? ya eh::::: no I can't walk with the h-djellaba-h-h,=  
 3 LW no?  
 4 S =but I la- I love to wear- wear it sometimes/ if I go to the  
**hammam** or something eh near, (.4) I eh wear a djellaba  
 5 LW you can't walk? or you can-  
 6 S no eh, w- ya, it's- it's- it's- **difficult**, I don't know, it's eh  
 em (.) if you have the long djellaba, it's (.) *ja en je loopt toch*  
*een beetje:, je bent niet gewend, ik weet niet* *you walk like a*  
*little: you are not used to it, I don't know*  
 7 A *bijna nooit (aandoen)*  
*I hardly (wear them)*  
 8 S it's not that I cannot walk with it, but *ja het zit niet echt eh*  
*je moet `r effe aan wennen, want hier doe je `t nooit aan dus ja*  
*yeah, it doesn't sit*  
*right, you have to get used to it because you don't wear them here*  
*so yeah*  
 9 LW it's different feeling, you have to walk slower hehahhah  
 10 S ya! it's **different** ya. but it's **comfortable** because everything,  
 (.3) you have the feeling everything is emm: (1.0)  
 11 A [[covered  
 12 S [[bedekt/ covered  
 13 S yeah, but *je moet `r aan wennen*  
*you have to get used to it*
- 

Shirin explains over several conversational turns about her preference for, but difficulty in walking in a djellaba. Though Anissa interjects that she “hardly [wears them]” (Line 7), Shirin continues her efforts to explain her meaning: she is able to walk, but it requires “getting used to” (Line 8) because she is not in the habit of wearing them here (in Europe). After I laughingly comment that “you have to walk slower” (Line 9), Shirin agrees, then contradicts the discomfort expressed in her previous statements by emphasizing that it (the djellaba) is “comfortable”. Identifying how that ‘comfort’ manifests, both women simultaneously utter “covered”, in English and Dutch (Lines 11 and 12).

‘Feeling covered’ here becomes an important intersection between place, material body, and social dimensions of modesty enacting particular gazes and creating felt reactions, recognizable to all three interlocutors, in these emergent corporealities. The fact that Shirin is both uncomfortable in a djellaba because she is not ‘used to’ it, and comfortable in it because she feels ‘covered’ (a feeling that Anissa seems aware of as well, in how she simultaneously voiced its English translation) demonstrates a spatial dimension to ‘wearing a djellaba’ as a clothing practice. It is something both women are unaccustomed to doing in one diasporic node (Europe), but Shirin has attempted in another diasporic node (Morocco), in alignment with her activities there. While her body may not be

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<sup>1</sup> The interview is transcribed using adapted conversation analysis conventions (see Atkinson and Heritage 1984). In contrast to many common methods for analyzing interviews, this approach will include analysis based on the sequential and interactive nature of talk (Sacks 1992; Schegloff 2007), beyond the lexical content. Participants were told they can speak in English or their native Dutch, whichever might be easier. The interviewer question in line 1 that begins this section of talk, was following other questions about objects and clothing they like to buy in Morocco, including the elaborate dresses (*takshetas*) that many women have tailor-made in Morocco.

Transcription conventions:

Bold = emphasis; italic = Dutch; - = hesitation/stop; : = elongation; h = breath; [[ = simultaneous turn-taking; = = continuous speech over turns; ? = strong rising tone; , = weak rising tone; . = strong falling tone; / = weak falling tone; () = uncertain transcription; (#) = length of pause.

used to it, in terms of the movements permitted by its shape, her corporeal materiality also appreciates 'feeling covered'.

Questions of 'coveredness' in Islamic codes of dress, particularly as they apply to women (like Anissa and Shirin, as Muslims), are often framed through the political statements that they enable or disable, or through discourses on public versus private spaces (Secor 2002). They become readable as a set of (masculine) gazes, composed by and enforcing rules of moral order defining a feminine 'private', to which women resist and innovate to assert subjective expression. In this paper, I would like to expand on discussions about how Islamic modes of clothing can be fashionable, cosmopolitan and mobile (Tarlo 2007; Gökarıksel 2012; Gökarıksel and Secor 2010a, 2010b; Mahmood 2005; Falah and Nagel 2005), by engaging the corporeal materialities of bodies that absorb and enmesh with gazes, rules, spaces, environments, and fabrics that cover their flesh. This framing is built on an understanding of bodies as generative and productive as much as reactive, in intra-action (Barad 2007) within and without.

This orientation, I contend, can be productive for understanding how corporeal discomforts negotiate and intra-act a shame::modesty spectrum as they move with their clothing across spaces shaped by different gazes and discourses. Within the scope of this paper, I will be purposefully vague about what those discourses may include, as an effort to avoid producing or attributing 'context' to these processes beyond the social ordering experienced in the practice of 'feeling covered' (Katz 1999; Turowetz et al. 2016). Instead of characterizing this as a process of disciplining onto and through bodies via 'discourse', I want to take all of these agents—knowledgeable bodies, malleable clothes, and spatially moral gazes—as intra-actively influencing each other, so that the bodies are reshaping and reforming along with 'discourse'. In short, I want to explore how 'modesty' matters, including and beyond the 'subjected' bodies (Barad 2007).

My suggestion for this orientation to bodies becoming 'modest' is based in ethnographic exploration that was not analytically focused on this topic as the core investigation. Rather, these observations about embodied practices for clothing oneself 'modestly', and some of the paradoxes thereof, emerged in the context of research about diasporic mobilities of European-Moroccans in Morocco. Both the performance of this research as ethnographic and the fact that it focused on mobile agents, regularly traveling in and out of Morocco as members of a European-born and raised diaspora, play a role in how the examples below can be analyzed. My mobility as a non-Muslim, non-Moroccan woman and their mobility as Moroccan-origin Muslims come into play as we all cross back and forth between European and Moroccan regimes of morality, and how they can infuse into our bodies as a way of knowing the world.

To analyze these intra-actions incorporating my own ethnographic apparatus to understand how 'comfort' can be achieved for different Muslim Moroccan women across diasporic space, I draw upon Karen Barad's framework for agential realism as diffraction: inserting myself as observer/apparatus in this dynamic and exploring onto-epistemologically how I am able to know such practices by absorbing them (Jackson and Mazzei 2011). After a short discussion on agential realism, I present an object of study in how modesty can be produced through clothing practices engaged in by Muslim women, with a discussion of how these might be subjected to different regimes of morality across spaces. I address only religion as a morality regime here—not education, political climate, or other social variables—because across the quoted and many other diasporic women who might experience 'feeling uncovered', these spaces are characterized between enforcement of 'religiousness' or 'secularness'. Next, I discuss how my ethnographic apparatus, through a process of learning how to dress in Morocco in my own female body, substantiates a framework through which I can diffractively observe the practices and moralities of others around me. My observations, along with those expressed by women who participated in the research and are quoted here, diffract into an analysis of how certain clothing, corporeal lived bodies, and fluid regimes of morality entangle in a Moroccan summertime landscape filled with diasporic visitors. This diffraction resolves, finally, into an intra-active modesty: not conclusive, directional, or necessarily readable through ways that certain women choose to (or feel forced to) cover or uncover their skin, but emergent and entangling as intra-actions of all these elements.

## 2. Object: Modesty of Dress for Muslim Women

Whether about putting clothes on or taking them off, how Muslim women's bodies are clothed draws social attention. This attention is composed and constructed not only through moral gazes, but in how those gazes materialize, rendering acceptable or unacceptable certain entanglements of bodies and clothing, taking place in certain spaces. While the de-clothing of that woman on the beach (Box 2 below) is enmeshed in ongoing evolutions of a political, moral, and securitized landscape that draws links between the coveredness of a Muslim body and physical and ideological risks to France, Noura's sense of being required to wear a djellaba when going out in Fez (Box 3 below) is likewise entangled with ongoing debates in the political, cultural and religious landscape across Morocco. These two examples illustrate how modesty of dress for a Muslim woman becomes an object that changes shape and matters along with dispersed spaces, clothing practices and diverse corporealities. This section builds a formulation of 'modesty' in relation to the spaces, practices, and corporealities that become relevant for the Muslim Moroccan-European women under discussion here.

### Box 2. Wearing a burkini.

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On 23 August 2016, global news websites were plastered with images of a woman being pressured by police to remove layers of her clothing. Sitting on a beach in Nice, France, she was ticketed 'for not wearing "an outfit respecting good morals and secularism"' (Quinn 2016); a witness attested that some onlookers applauded the police while the woman's young daughter cried.

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### Box 3. Interview extract: going out in a dress.

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Noura, Arena Palace Cafe, Fez, 29 July 2008 40 s

1 N ...nous je vais dire euh: moi je vous dire eh: la journée je peut pas sortir en robe comme ça. la journée je-suis obligée de mettre un djellab- une djell[aba  
us, I'm saying, I'm telling you eh: during the day I can't go out in a dress like this, during the day I'm obligated to put on a djellab- a djell[aba

2 LW [ouais °ouais°  
[yeah °yeah°

3 N parce que: sinon c'est toute la journée eh (.4) les:: va dire eh/les gens d'ici nous abordent, mais eh  
because: otherwise it's all day eh (1.4) the:: let's say eh/the people from here talk to us but eh

4 LW ouais  
yeah

5 N avec eh (.) sans respect quoi.  
with eh (.) without respect

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Before addressing the interpretative moralities of Islam or the clothing practices, I need to clarify how bodies here are understood as malleable and knowledgeable, themselves mattering intra-actively with other elements, through agential realism.

### 2.1. Mattering Barad and Agential Realism

Matter, Barad asserts, "is the sedimenting historicity of practices/agencies and an agentive force in the world's differential becoming" (Barad 2007, p. 180). For the present case, 'feeling covered', observed through the ways individual women intra-act with their clothing, 'matters' here as a triangulation of how these different agents meet in harmonious cooperation, and how different forms of 'discomfort' manifest and indicate their dissonance. Attending to these entanglements of matter, and the matter they iteratively produce, enables ineffable corporeal sensations and experiences, especially those, like a sense of feeling 'covered', that are difficult for an observer to record, to take part in an analysis of how modesty is produced through these (Muslim, female) bodies. The 'agents'

thus include intangible, ineffable and indescribable sensations of corporeal comfort as well as the human and non-human actors that convene in observed moments and reported perceptions as mattering: literally making materiality in the intra-activity of all participating tangible and intangible entities.

Construing ‘modesty’ ethnomethodologically as an intra-active process enables an analysis of how corporeal materialities integrate gazes, how gazes produce clothing styles, and how clothing styles respond with and to corporeal manifestations. Such intra-actions might include how others experiencing the same trouble as Shirin (above) have adapted djellabas (shortened lengths, added longer slits, incorporated matching trousers) so they are more easily walkable. Such adjustments of clothing, as well as the intra-action between body and clothing experienced by Shirin and Noura, and recognized by myself and Anissa, become observable as entities enmeshed in the social ordering of ‘modesty’. Combining this kind of data on practical activity with Barad’s formulation of agential realism, enables an empirical examination of how bodies formulate possible gazes and how clothing, as well as discourses, institutions and other potential agents involved, formulate possible bodies. Ontologically and methodologically, I attempt to approach this emergent mattering from the event outwards (Katz 1999), taking seriously Shirin’s sense of ‘coveredness’ as matter rather than discourse, and attempting to trace what agents and intra-actions contribute to it.

To apply this framework specifically to bodies and clothing, I find myself aligning with Hanson (2007), who is frustrated with the theoretical means at hand to discuss how clothing and bodies interact in both material/physical and discursive ways, all of which become part of corporeal physicality beyond simply a layer of clothing to cover one’s skin. Discussing drag-kinging women, she approaches their clothing practices as sensory sites of the ‘felt’ effects of transformation, where the work of producing masculinized female bodies materializes other social forces of dominance and liberation (Hanson 2007, p. 78). The ‘becoming’ of this is, for her, a palimpsest of visual and carnal layers interacting with each other, from the physical body through the layers of clothing and costuming (Cavallaro and Warwick 1998). Transformations enacted through these bodies become molecular in their layering, as interactions between the tingling of exposed skin, gazes of proximate others and the fabric of clothing wherein all aspects to this assemblage are malleable, and any one has the potential to become agentive in this complex interaction. That is, rejecting the some of the prevailing ways of examining the (re)production of masculinity through similar sites of embodied transformation, she demonstrates the dynamic untenability of conventionally imagined boundaries to a corporeal body by embracing the “ambiguous and irreducible relationship that exists between dress and the body” (Hanson 2007, p. 103).

Drawing heavily on Barad (Barad 2003, 2007) and a post-humanist phenomenological approach to embodiment, this theoretical approach produces an understanding of how bodies, through their desires, affects, mutabilities and creativities, materialize social relations. It has a different starting place than parallel research on embodied subjectivity and the symbolic identity of clothing, such as the ‘material culture’ field reflected in work like that of Dick Hebdige and Daniel Miller, by presuming agency on the part of human and non-human actors in assemblage as opposed to reading bodies primarily as a canvas for mapping social expressions and relations. Instead of tracing the genealogical history of a style through its uses and referents, here the focus is on the materiality and corporeality within a new materialist ontology that approaches bodies and their clothing (or clothing and their bodies) as emergent, lived matter (Coole 2010).

## 2.2. *Shame: Modesty*

Modesty is itself thus a meeting point of material corporealities and moral regimes. It can be conceived in response to an emotion of ‘shame’, itself describing both an immediate and an internalized sense of inadequacy or inappropriateness, intertwined with social norms and values defining adequacy and appropriateness. Modesty is one reaction to shame, or to an anticipation of shame. These are, as Dolezal argues in *The Body and Shame*, a set of emotions that depend on self-reflexivity, but are also inherently social, arising ‘in the interaction between bodies; [involving] an intensification of the body’s surface and its visibility’ (Dolezal 2015, p. 5) and a corporeal affective

experience of physical changes (heat, blushing, goosebumps, etc.) (Dolezal 2015, p. 6). In other words, shame::modesty, as a spectrum of emotion, require intra-action with a social world, with moralities and expectations, and with a corporeal material self to emerge.

Dolezal further claims that women's bodies are more frequently a site for shame than men's (Dolezal 2015, p. 7). That observation extends into anthropological literature on Islamic communities, where an 'honor/shame' dichotomy was an entrenched framework for analysis (cf. Bauer 1985; Abu-Lughod 1986), often focusing on the regulation and production of honor. This anthropological attention has, historically, often rested on what has been codified as a defining characteristic of Muslim societies: the production of gender separation whether spatial (Bourdieu 1979), emotional (Abu-Lughod 1986) or through female clothing practices (El Guindi 1999), all of which seek to 'protect' women's visibility by regulating when, where, and how (e.g., what physical parts of their bodies) might be visible. While, as Dolezal indicates, women's bodies anywhere have been subject to production as 'shameful' in a multitude of ways (Dolezal 2015, p. 106), the particular configurations of visibility of women's bodies in an Islamic moral framework create specific conditions for visibility—of their bodies as whole or as bodies in components, like hair, skin or limbs—that enter into an intra-action of modesty.

Of these various visibility practices, veiling is often discussed as a key example of how Islam interacts with shame and modesty in regulating female behavior. The many variations on wearing a veil reflect many possible interpretations on what the Qur'an (Surah 24: 30–31) requires as a modestly covered body. Both sexes are enjoined to cover the 'awrah, or parts of body that should not be public, which includes the area from the navel to the knee for both men (though male negotiations of this requirement seem to be less frequently researched) and women (Badr 2004). Manifesting as an interpretation of a religious text, like any parallel practice, veiling is not related to only one dimension of social life: veiling or not-veiling can be a stylistic, pragmatic, or unreflective choice, based as much in a social, political, or economic environment as it might reflect spiritual beliefs, or sacralization (El Guindi 1999) or politicization (Badr 2004) of a woman's body. As Secor (2002) argues, veiling acts as part of a symbolic order that configures spatialities in complex ways, both as fashion-conscious stylistic expression and as a corporeal form for negotiating external political realities. Furthermore, wearing a veil cannot be simply equated to creating a 'modest' body to the extent that being 'modest' by covering one's head can be done in a showy and immodest way (Secor 2002, p. 10; White 1999). As it travels along with a body, veiling reflects one of the many ways women negotiate moral regimes on the visibility of their bodies and their access to both public and private spaces.

In this sense, veiling, along with modes of regulating visibility of women, can be interpreted ultimately as spatial regimes. Visibilities that might produce 'shame'—such as showing the area from the navel to the knee—are of course possible among certain gazing others within enclosed or private spaces, where the form of enclosure or privacy is also itself a negotiation of perceptions. Elizabeth Fernea (1998) recounts shooting sequences of an ethnographic film on women in Marrakech in a hammam, while the women participating were taking part in their normal acts of bathing; knowing full well that the images of their uncovered bodies, normally restricted to the vision of other women alone, would be visible to a broad and unknowable public. While spatialities of visibility can be regulated by doors and walls defining public from private, they can also be reformulated through technologies and other interpretive materialities in ways that become acceptable as 'modest' to those who interact with a given moral regime.

In short, shame and modesty need to be taken as not merely an event of a consciousness, more or less directly related to an assumed problematic visibility, but a complex interaction of events, corporealities, and reactions that are material and cognitive as much as emotional and affective (Dolezal 2015, p. 119). As Barad would contend, these are intra-actions: "not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency" (Barad 2007, p. 151) that matters. The mattering of this intra-action—which I am focused on here as producing 'modesty'—leaves marks on the entities and bodies involved.

These explorations point to how modesty and immodesty are imprecise moralities, even in Muslim-dominant spaces where they appear more delineated and fixed. Though many of these discourses relate to women's bodies, as does much of the data I discuss here, notions of modesty and

appropriate dress may also apply to Muslim men. In this sense, what becomes ‘modesty’ here is a negotiation between Islamic spaces, bodies and practices of being covered rooted in Morocco and, for these visitors, practices that travel with them from Christian-dominant public spheres in Europe. That is, ‘modesty’ is not a definable object outside the intra-actions it produces through (gendered) bodies, clothing, and (spatial) gazes, none of which can be entirely separated from the other in this entangled object. The next section presents Barad’s methodology for approaching such an object through entanglement might be constructed through an ‘apparatus’.

### 3. Apparatus: Ethnographic Learning across Diasporic Space

Seeing the succession of images widely published showing an anonymized woman removing a shirt to reveal her bare arms underneath, I felt a visceral shiver of modesty in my own skin. Though I cannot claim affinity with her position or circumstances in almost any other way, I can recognize the sense of feeling de-clothed: of having an instinctive, practiced sense of how one’s own body should be covered, of how that covering becomes connected with one’s body as a single organism, and of the sense of violence when that layer is forcibly removed. Via Barad, my intimate knowledge and experience of ‘uncoveredness’ becomes part of my apparatus for knowing in this assemblage (Jackson and Mazzei 2011).

When Noura explained to me her embodied preference to be covered by a djellaba when out in the city during the day (as opposed to within the enclosed café where we were sitting; see Fernea 1998), I expressed sympathetic and empathetic affect in my response. Not only was her answer recognizable from other reports by other diasporic Moroccan women about their clothing choices in Morocco, it was recognizable through my personal clothing choices, learned over accumulated visits, interactions, gazes, admonishments, and goosebumps as a non-Moroccan visitor in Morocco.

An attempt to analyze an embodied experience of modesty is itself an epistemological project. While we can interview individuals about such experiences, discursive descriptions are inevitably removed from some of the ineffable and ephemeral dimensions of how that experience manifests in through bodies. They provide evidence that the phenomenon exists, but relatively limited data on how it might be felt. Alternately, an attempt to track how such embodied reactions are produced in naturally-occurring encounters—such as recording heart rates or perspiration (Dolezal 2015, p. 12)—would be technologically challenging, and still may not produce meaningful data on the phenomenon. Because a manifestation of modesty (e.g., through an experience of shame) involves many simultaneous interactions (e.g., increasing heart rate along with some discursive narrative of a cause), we need to examine it through a more complex apparatus that considers both how self-reflexive subjects understand their own shame and how un-reflexive bodies experience it.

Along these lines, ethnographic attention works as an apparatus, in the way Barad defines it, for producing a diffractive analysis. Diffraction poses a distinctive analysis from the social constructionist effort at reflexivity:

Whereas reflexivity, based on the visual metaphor of reflection, calls on the researcher to recognize and disclose her positionality by reflecting on her raced, classed, gendered, and geographic characteristics (among others), diffraction attends to the ways in which actors intra-act with, interfere with, and reinforce one another to produce difference in those bodies (and their positionalities) and in research. It is a relational method where process and change are constitutional. (Neely and Nguse 2015, pp. 141–42).

By proposing ethnography as a diffractive apparatus, this analysis incorporates ways that participants like Shirin and Noura report their experiences as well as ways that an embodied and learning ethnographer (Hasse 2014) develops understandings of such experiences over time. Following Barad, this apparatus is an open-ended practice (Barad 2007, p. 170): an instrument that is part of observation, not separate from it, producing ‘*dynamic (re)configurings of the world through which bodies are intra-actively materialized*’ (Barad 2007, pp. 169–70, italics original).

For the purposes of this project, the apparatus has two key dimensions: *ethnographic time*, documented below through the ongoing and long-term learning process involved in executing this

research, and the agential cut of *diasporic space*, incorporating emergent configurations of places and borders that participants encounter as Muslim Moroccan women from Europe. This agential cut is integral to how the ethnographic apparatus is designed, in the sense that it is “a constructed cut between the object and the agencies of observation” (Barad 2007, p. 196), “mark[ing] off a particular instance of wholeness” (Barad 2007, p. 197) from other kinds of wholeness in the environment. In other words, the multifaceted, material and discursive production of these spaces is both the object of study and interfered with (and interfering in) how the study is executed. Engaging these spaces through this apparatus presumes that they can be studied as an object, while simultaneously presuming their malleability and interrogating when, how, and why they might exist. Both these aspects of apparatus combine for a diffractive analysis that specifies the time spaces through which I have come to observe and learn about embodied senses of modesty and the fixity and malleability of how clothing practices and discourses of modesty are enacted across physical locations.

### 3.1. Ethnographic Time

The ethnographic timeline for this project could begin in the summer of 1999, when I first visited Morocco as a tourist, first encountered many Moroccans from Europe travelling to Morocco for summer holidays, and first purchased a gondorra (see below) as a ‘local’ item of clothing to wear myself. In a more scientifically rigorous sense, it could begin at the summer of 2003, when I began interviewing Moroccans from Europe about their experiences of visiting during my stay in Fez as a language student. Since then, I have been in perennial communication with Morocco and Moroccans (from Europe and from Morocco) in face-to-face conversations and friendships, via mediated distances (telephone, chat, social media, news media), and through academic research (Minca and Wagner 2016; Wagner 2017). Through all these modes of contact, I have been a learning ethnographer (Hasse 2014) in innumerable aspects of being and becoming ‘Moroccan’ (Wagner 2017), which cannot be enumerated here.

Limiting this timeline to the topic of this analysis—clothing, bodies and discourses of modesty about women—I can recount some moments when I have learned how to wear clothing ‘correctly’ within environments where I was participating. Some moments were through expressed attention to my clothing, like the time I was wearing a sleeveless shirt, waiting outside for a visitor to arrive to a friend’s house, and my friend came out to tease me about sitting on the street “practically naked”. Other moments were in attention to other people’s clothing: the way I have seen women get dressed and undressed at homes and at hammams through a series of layers, from a decorative outside through cotton pyjamas and underwear; the way mothers, daughters and sisters tugged down at each other’s shirts to make sure all of their stomach skin stays carefully covered; the way a group of male tour guides jokingly called an unsuspecting European tourist a prostitute (in Moroccan Arabic) while indicating to me how her breasts were visible through her shirt; and, of course, the way I have been catcalled on the street in Morocco, no matter what kind of clothing I wear. Beyond Morocco and beyond a research context, my ethnographic understandings of these intra-actions have been influenced as well by conversations with friends about their own choices for clothing practices: about when, where and how to wear a veil, for example, or about what regimes of morality in proximity (like parents) or globally (like Wahhabism) are affecting their behavior.

My own perspective as an ethnographer has, of course, evolved over time through this process. When I first purchased items of Moroccan clothing (a djellaba in 2003, a gondorra in 1999), I wore them like Western-style dresses, with no layer of clothing underneath. From watching others, I learned that I had been walking around “practically naked” because of the ways these items are designed to be worn with other layers: the open pocket-holes in a *djellaba* offer a portal to interior hidden pockets, presuming there is more clothing underneath; gondorras, often made from very lightweight cotton, are generally effectively translucent, and cannot be ‘modestly’ worn without additional layers.

As an ethnographer engaging with participants across different spaces, and myself living in European cities since 2004, I have also learned, and had opportunities to observe, how these practices persist across diasporic borders. For myself, I can recognize at least one instinctive embodiment of



'Moroccan' modesty that I practice whether in Morocco or elsewhere: the sense that my stomach should be covered. Though I often prefer to wear sleeveless shirts, I find myself tugging down at my clothes to make sure my abdominal skin is completely covered, even considering that as a factor when shopping for new shirts. While this development may not be entirely attributable to learning how to become 'Moroccan', it is certainly imbued with my participation in this environment, and contributes to how I become a diffractive apparatus to analyze what sort of clothing practices contour diasporic spaces

### 3.2. *Diasporic Space*

The broader project through which these data were collected was an investigation of linguistic and leisure practices by Moroccan-origin Europeans who visit Morocco during their summer holidays, called diasporic visitors (DVs). Within a framework of migration studies, and persistent questions about post-migrant generations sense of 'belonging' in a sending or receiving country, the objective was to investigate how 'belonging' is pursued, enacted, negotiated, and abandoned in face-to-face encounters between individuals coming from a diaspora of descendants of Moroccan emigrants to Europe and Moroccans living in Morocco. By investigating these interwoven practices of what kinds of activities they do in Morocco, during what is effectively their vacation leisure time, and how they are able to interact with others—in what languages, to what purposes—this project analyzed how diasporic mobilities between spaces contribute to regenerating practices of visiting a homeland and producing discourses about others through those visits.

Implicitly, these visits involve crossing political borders between places that have historically produced themselves as different along a parameter of religion. Whether these imaginations involve secularism in contrast to theocracy or differentiate between Christianity(ies) and Islam(s), religion (present or absent) is a parameter through which moral behavior is differently contoured across these spaces. While embodiment of religion was not a topic directly investigated in the research, it was a dimension of practice that participants indicated as relevant to their sense of space in Morocco versus in Europe. That differentiation was often made relevant by participants through practical means—such as, as one participant identified, being able to eat at any McDonald's in Morocco because all the meat would be halal, as opposed to Europe (Wagner 2017)—rather than as a discursive or imaginative condition that might 'attract' them to Morocco. Effectively, while they might have access to spaces and places in Europe that acknowledged Islamic moralities and customs, in Morocco that space was not as practically confined, and assumed to be everywhere.

The 'everywhereness' of Islamic moralities in Morocco as opposed to Europe is also embodied through practices that participants would choose *not* to do, or feel they needed to 'hide' while in Morocco. One example is found in the different practical contours of 'safety' in public space for diasporic women in Morocco, where gazes, masculinities, and norms of leisure practices might contrast to how they participate in public space in Europe (Wagner and Peters 2014). Importantly, the way that 'safety' might be perceived and embodied across the differentiated morality of Islamic or Western spaces is by no means universally agreed upon: to the extent that moral transgression is negotiated through many interwoven, intra-acting dimensions, embodied performances of moral responsibility (or transgression) are malleable, complex, and necessarily incorporate borders that might otherwise be invisible to an observer. The agential cut performed by examining diasporic practices across political borders, therefore, is not an examination of how those political borders delineate practices related to religious moralities, but how practices may produce, define, or diminish the importance of those borders; and possibly produce entirely different borders themselves (Wagner 2017).

In relation to clothing as embodied practice that recognizes both religious morality and the habituated individual body, using diasporic space as an agential cut is a means to observe how embodied practices circulate within this space, incorporating influences and antagonists from different nodes within it. Building the examples used above, this cut recognizes how both Noura and the woman on the beach are dressing 'normally' for some nodal position where they might otherwise find themselves; whether in wearing dresses that expose more skin when going out in France, or in

wearing burkini-style covering to the beach in Morocco. Likewise, they are both negotiating negative responses when repeating that practice in a different node; both, effectively, being told how to dress by the reactions of men in proximity. By considering both examples within a spectrum of diasporic space, we can interrogate how their clothing, embodied practices, and environments produce manifestations of Islamic morality about female modesty.

#### 4. Diffractions: Clothing, Publics, Corporealities

Examining clothing practices, public moralities, and diasporic corporealities as a learning ethnographer in this context, I continue to build on Barad's framework by approaching this analysis as diffractive. As Mazzei (2013, p. 779) describes it,

in a diffractive process of data analysis, a reading of data with theoretical concepts (and/or multiple theoretical concepts) produces an emergent and unpredictable series of readings as data and theory make themselves intelligible to one another. Such knowing on the part of the researcher and her world requires a rethinking of agency as distributed between and among the human and non-human.

While previous sections have discussed various forms of clothing styles (djellaba, burkini), the analysis below focuses on a particular silhouette, what I will collect here to under the name *gondorra*, which has become particularly noticeable as a non-human agent moving through different diasporic spaces across the ethnographic timeline over which I have observed them. In terms of moralities, this particular style also sits between a djellaba and a burkini, as a way that Muslim diasporic Moroccan visitors have developed to negotiate 'coveredness'. It is reflective of their leisure activities as holiday visitors—such as, quite often, going to the beach, where a burkini might be a 'normal' mode of attire—and sense of modesty as understood and enacted in Morocco, in the same spaces where Shirin and Noura felt themselves needing to be more 'covered' by a djellaba. The agency here thus is distributed between these clothing styles and silhouettes, the moralities of public gazes, and affective sensations of corporeality lived through knowledgeable bodies.

Having formulated above an object of study—the production of corporeal and sartorial modesty in Islamic contexts—I use three formulations below that each combine two of the three non-human agents—clothing, publics and corporealities—to explore how this entanglement produces between human and non-human actors. First, I examine how wearing *gondorras* emerges as a material corporeality, engaging body with clothing, within diasporic spatial networks of Moroccans from Europe when they visit Morocco (and as they return with them to Europe). Taking this emergent practice through the lens of ethnographic experience, I demonstrate how it becomes recognizably, affectively dissonant with the kinds of moralities of clothing and gazes I have learned to respond to in Morocco. Finally, by pulling one participant as a self-reflexive agent into this diffractive analysis process, I can revisit and revise Shirin's (and Noura's) sense of needing more covering with one woman for whom a *gondorra* means she needs less.

##### 4.1. Wearing *Gondorras*

*Gondorras* are a common piece of clothing found in markets anywhere in Morocco that comes in forms for both genders, differentiated mostly by vibrant colors for women and greys, browns and blacks for men. The basic shape is a long and rectangular loose-fitting sheath, made from light cotton or polyester, with arm openings that cover shoulders without a separate sewn sleeve, and sometimes pockets or side holes positioned to access interior pockets. The armholes and collar may be embroidered, giving some stylistic variation beyond the fabric to what is otherwise a very simple garment. It has different names in different parts of the country, and I have heard it be called a 'marrakshia', 'b'daya', 'gondorra' or pyjama, depending on the region and gender. They are generally interior, household clothing for women, and more often worn outside by men (Box 4).

**Box 4.** Field notes: Oasiria aquatic park, Marrakech, 9 August 2008.

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we get up to leave, and Nawel is in her 3rd ensemble—from a shorter pattern dress to an ample marrakshia with the sides tucked in...I'm wondering, where she got that idea from? is this everywhere?

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Though gondorras were a common and available clothing style long before I started this research (I myself purchased one on my first visit to Morocco in 1999), they have emerged at some point as an article of clothing that all DVs have one or more of in their closet. Within my ethnographic times cape, during summer fieldwork in 2007 and 2008 I noticed this style seemingly springing up as leisure clothing worn outside primarily by young DVs, as I remarked in the field note above. From north to south, in many cities, beaches, and leisure sites around Morocco where European-Moroccans visit their family homes, it became easier to observe that item of clothing and reliably suspect that the wearer was a diasporic visitor. In this field note, my comment not only addresses her ownership of this item, now seemingly 'everywhere', but also her manner of wearing it 'tucked in at the sides' (see Figure 1 below), that seems to also be 'everywhere'.

Both men and women invested in them: one male participant referred to his preference for 'traditional' clothing in an interview, and I later discovered he meant a gondorra, while another woman, buying presents for her female cousins who were checking on her house while she was on holiday, chose several colors of *gondorra*, since, as she explained, a new color would always be welcome in their collection. During that same visit, her sister was searching for a new one to buy for her growing son. While many of them seemed to be bought for use primarily during the summer holidays in Morocco, I also noticed, in April 2011, a woman in a *gondorra* at a shopping mall in Liège, Belgium, searching for a car in the parking lot.



**Figure 1.** This participant still wears her gondorra, while her friend has his folded on the chair next to him. The woman in bright pink in the distant background is also wearing a gondorra over layers (used with permission).

Though the inception point would be impossible to trace, owning, shopping for, buying, and wearing gondorras has embedded itself as a practice within the Moroccan summer holiday time space for diasporic visitors much in the same way a 'suit' becomes a recognizable corporeal grammar of clothing for Mazzei (Mazzei 2013). Costing between seven and fifteen Euros, made of lightweight fabrics in colors that resonate with the beach and poolside leisure activities that take place during most visits, gondorras have become emblematic of certain affects and part of how the practice of 'being in Morocco' is achieved. In some ways they may reflect a sense of authenticity and tradition, as an item of clothing that comes from Morocco in several profound ways: using fabrics that are supposedly produced there, and often featuring embroidery that repeats across different Moroccan textiles and clothing styles. Yet, the emergence over ethnographic time of this garment as *de rigueur* for any DV to have, in multiple colors, indicates how its practice exceeds its symbolic meaning. While they may index traditionality, they function for the summer heat, for their colorful decoration, and for me, as well as for DVs themselves, as a sign for recognizing other diasporic visitors in the streets. It becomes a corporeal, fashion practice through which the summer time space of diasporic Morocco is mattered.

#### 4.2. Malleable Moralities

This field note (Box 5 below) indicates both a recognition of how gondorras were taking place as a clothing practice in this environment, and how I was learning to understand them ethnographically. This was the first moment I recorded thoughts about this practice, which I had noticed a year earlier, of DVs wearing gondorras to the beach. At the time, I registered my impression of this practice as 'bizarre': an ethnographic judgement that comes after my previously discussed experiences in Morocco about what is appropriate clothing to wear on the street. While this commentary concerned male beachgoers wearing gondorras, and the rest of my argument focuses on feminine modesty, they were nevertheless wearing them in what seemed a risqué fashion: with only swim shorts underneath.

##### Box 5. Field notes: Sabadia Beach, near Al Hoceima, 22 July 2008

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I'm noticing more and more men wearing gondorras to go to the beach: to my mind, there's a feeling of strutting in this kind of native outfit, something the same men probably would never wear in EU. Also, they all look fresh and new, the gondorras, and they are often not wearing full clothing underneath, instead wearing it as a sort of beach cover-up. Bizarre.

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Calling that practice 'risqué' is a diffractive judgement made through ethnographic experience. While for DVs gondorras may seem an ideal beach cover-up—long, loose, comfortable, yet unique and fashionable—for others in Morocco they are more commonly worn in the same way most 'traditional' Moroccan clothes are worn, as the topmost in a series of layers. They may be similarly associated with leisure and comfort for resident Moroccan men, to the extent that in families where I have been present I observed men wearing them on their day off from work. In parallel, I have seen resident Moroccan women wearing them as they work around the house, or visit nearby neighbors, but not to go further than the immediate neighborhood; not out into the city, or to the beach, as DVs do. In addition, they have material features that, to maintain 'modesty', require them to be worn over something else: male versions, for example, come with side holes instead of pockets so that one can access an interior trouser pocket, and female versions, though more bright and colorful, are still too thin of a material to wear solo.

These factors of design and materiality of the clothing itself are part of the reason why Figure 1 above and the observations noted at Sabadia Beach registered to me, through ethnographic experience, as 'immodest'. Unlike the clothing practices I have been trained to embody in Morocco, these seem to use a gondorra as if it itself is sufficiently 'covering'; these bodies do not seem to feel the sensation of shame of skin that might be visible through a thin fabric. The sense of being 'covered', as identified by Shirin and Anissa above, is fulfilled for them as it is not for me, producing a diffractive moment where the corporeal capacities of their bodies and of mine create dissonance. Much like how

Mazzei (2013) hones in on one participant's description of buying and wearing a 'suit' as an expression of power, these diffractive observations engage both my knowledge about 'gondorra-wearing', discourses about it, and how I understand it to be an expression of self, as well as how I have experienced subjectivities through that practice:

I could feel the affect, what it produced in us as women trying to assert ourselves and to be taken seriously and our compliance to norms and resistance in ways that brought the material back into my reading and knowledge making—both intellectually and physically. The suit intra-acted with my discursive constructions to produce a different subjectivity, both then and now. I therefore, at some level, can continue to read this intra-action as a result of a discursive construction that prescribes a specific list of do's and don'ts in order for women (and men) to be taken seriously in the work place. (Mazzei 2013, p. 783)

Yet, instead of showing how DVs are conforming to the prescriptions of their 'suit', these observations indicate how, in this intra-action, they are forging a specific, possibly 'diasporic', mode of clothing practice that ignores (or is ignorant of) moralities that might impinge upon it.



**Figure 2.** Women walking in central Tangier, summer 2015 (photograph by the author).

Of course, not all DV wearers of gondorras would be using them in the same way, as much as they might serve as a cover over a bikini, they might also serve as a cover over a burkini, part of the way to move between home and beach that embodies diasporic modesties and belongings simultaneously. The combined need for some kind of covering (which may be, relating to local gazes and moralities, inadequate) with a sense of the body underneath it, slightly visible through the fabric, or through the way that 'tucking in' establishes the waistline, hipline, and possibly contours of the



legs, become entanglements of clothing and corporeality that challenge a gaze I had learned to practice. This is by no means to suggest that there is any intention for 'immodesty' on the part of *gondorra*-wearers; in fact, the tucking practice may be also related to enabling a longer and faster stride to walk in a *gondorra*, often made too long and too narrow to move quickly. Tucking in to reduce its length is a strategy among women working at home as well, using ropes or apron strings to pull it up around the waist.

These diffraction patterns incorporate elements of cross-border corporealities as practiced in Morocco, through how their modes and manifestations incorporate elements from across diasporic space. DVs are not purposefully rejecting a spatially-formulated corporeal modesty, but collectively they are challenging and shifting what becomes 'acceptable', both as visible for women beyond their own neighborhoods, and on their own bodies.

#### 4.3. Diasporic Corporealities

As the diffractive analysis of this paper has developed over years of ethnographic attention and observation, it has also developed along with participants' feedback. In that sense, the diffraction pattern incorporates some aspect of mirroring reflexivity, reverberating ideas and practices between my learning experience as an ethnographer and their learning experience as participants.

The woman pictured in Figure 2 has played such a role, responding to not only questions about where and when she has seen *gondorra* in use, but also her reaction to the argument of this paper. She was one who, along with myself and a few others, noted that *gondorra* seemed to appear suddenly everywhere in this landscape; not a fashion from her youth, but one that has emerged in the last several years and become ubiquitous.

As a woman who veils, choosing to continue that practice out of habit and moral attention of her parents as much as out of her interpretation of its religious morality, she is normally dressed in more covering attire than as she is pictured above. In the Netherlands, I always see her in layers of long sleeves and long dresses, comfortably embodying the kind of 'coveredness' reflected by the woman on the beach in Nice. Yet, while discussing how *gondorra* enable a different kind of corporeality on the street, she observed that, for herself, it has become an acceptable way to be dressed beyond the house: on city streets, on the way to the beach. As much as the 'coveredness' she senses through her normal style of dress involves covered arms, covered legs, covering her neck and shoulders, the visible exposure of skin by a *gondorra* is not felt as such, as that item has entangled into her practice of DV corporeality in Morocco.

### 5. Conclusions: Intra-Actions

My "own" body is material, and yet this vital materiality is not fully or exclusively human. My flesh is populated and constituted by different swarms of foreigners. The crook of my elbow, for example, is "a special ecosystem, a bountiful home to no fewer than six tribes of bacteria..." The *its* outnumber the *mes*. In a world of vibrant matter, it is thus not enough to say that we are "embodied." We are, rather, an *array of bodies*, many different kinds of them in a nested set of microbiomes (Bennett 2010, pp. 112–13).

The langue of Sera, the suit, discursive constructions, textual practices, and becoming selves are mutually implicated in a production of possibilities both thought and unthought, actualised and unactualised. What matters is not the origin, but an opening of a different type of 'knowing produced in a co-constitutive relation between matter and discourse where it is impossible to pull apart the knower from the known' (Mazzei 2013, p. 784; citing Lenz Taguchi 2013, p. 715).

While Bennett frames the 'vibrant matter' of embodiment through the visceral molecular sensation of 'its' populating an array of 'mes', these 'its' are not only swarms of foreign bacteria. They include, I contend along with Mazzei, the integration of matter and discourse to become an intra-active 'mattering' of corporeality. In order to explore that process, I have drawn together what arrived as quite disparate moments of 'feeling uncovered', where Moroccan Muslim bodies were

encountering some kind of clothing, de-clothing, or re-clothing, through my own ethnographic apparatus of experience over time. What this shows is how these diasporic bodies are producing their own gazes, publics, and moralities through corporeal clothing practices, as much as they are responding and resisting when they move between different regimes of morality across borders. Effectively this is a 'mattering' of modesty, in the ways these bodies pass through different spaces and contour a sense of coveredness that resonates inwards and outwards.

Yet this analysis is not directed at equating either of these regimes with 'secularism' or 'Islam', to solidify what either of these do to define the spaces they control. Instead, this approach focuses on the practices engendered through how these regimes are malleable along with the mobilities of bodies crossing between them, and how these embodiments and their clothing become malleable as well. In that sense, this analysis has closer links to discussions of drag queens and their production of bodies through layers of clothing (Hanson 2007) than with the way veiling becomes a social, stylistic, or political statement. What is at issue here is not the symbolism of a gondorra as a traditional item of Moroccan material culture, nor of 'feeling covered' an indicator of Muslim regimes over women's bodies, but how it intervenes into other modes of practice (incidental to its 'authenticity') to reconfigure regimes of morality across diasporic space.

By using diasporic mobilities across space as an agential cut through which to observe 'modesty' as it can be produced in and through Muslim women's bodies, this approach embraces the molecular and agential fluidity of mattering. Questions about how moral gazes, women's bodies, and clothing becoming analyzable from the site of discomfort or 'trouble' outwards, engaging many possible dynamic directionalities, materialities, discourses, institutions and actors. Using Barad's proposal that these entanglements of entities are 'mattering' as much as they are (materially) mattered, enfolded in an ongoing generativity in and of the world embraces how these bodies matter. It rejects the implicit analytical or perceptual layering of tangible against intangible, separating bodies from clothing from gazes, and imagines these as single, intra-active organisms (arrays) with sometimes perceptible thresholds acting in assemblage. Each intra-active element manifests in the complex triangulations of clothing, gazes, visibilities, and corporeal materiality.

Using this as my initial framing, the analytical questions about entities enfolded in this dynamic equally address how the bodies involved are differentially iterating, *and* how the other mattering entities—gazes, perceptions and clothing itself—iterate to produce modesty that is 'enough' in some circumstances, for some bodies, and 'not enough' for others. It embraces how many different Muslim (Moroccan) women matter their clothing practices differently, "redefine[ing] objects as more in networks than in single sites, to trouble identity and experience, and what it means to know and to tell." (Lather 2016, p. 126). By approaching this topic ethnomethodologically, as an exploration of the achievement of social order, as well as through Barad's agential realism, I trace the production of shame: modesty from trouble outwards. This perspective provides a theoretical reframing with potential for much further productivity in approaching and analyzing the trajectories and experiences of shame: modesty as political, corporeal, and vibrant matter to those who experience its effects.

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