Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Manuscript 1610

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ORIGINAL STUDY

Islamic Hijab as a Border of Cloth: A Critical Spatial Theory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comprehensive analysis of the Islamic hijab, transcending traditional interpretations that often focus solely on political, cultural, religious, or gender dimensions. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the hijab through the application of critical spatial theory. It also fills this theoretical gap by providing a theoretical overview of the hijab with reference to Henri Lefebvre's concept of the spatial triad and Edward Soja's concept of Third Space, mainly. Using a conceptual and interdisciplinary strategy, the research combines the idea of sacred space in Islam with contemporary spatial theory to create a holistic understanding of hijab as a spatial practice, an embodied practice. This investigation argues that the hijab is not only a religious rule on cloth, but also "borders of cloth" that first produce the Muslim woman's body as a holy space and then also provide space for significant interaction in the public and social spheres. Going beyond binary opposition, such as oppression and emancipation, private vs public, religious vs secular, it shows how the hijab is used in perceived, conceptualised, and experienced environments. Based on the results, the hijab is a process of spatial negotiation that enables Muslim women to create an Islamic identity, preserve physical purity, and participate in modern society without compromising their religious beliefs. The article makes a significant contribution to the field of Islam, religion, and spatial studies through the use of critical spatial theory to analyse the embodied nature of religious practices, as well as offering a theoretically integrated interpretation that enables it to shape the ongoing debate around space, identity, embodiment, and lived religion.

Keywords: Islamic hijab, Critical spatial theory, Sacred space, Embodied religion, Muslim women's identity

Introduction

At the nexus of religion, gender, identity, politics, and public space, the Islamic headscarf continues to be one of the most contentious religious symbols in modern culture (Bokhari and Naz, 2026). The hijab has often been framed as either a contentious sign of gendered

Received 12 August 2026; revised 26 September 2026; accepted 4 October 2026.
Available online 15 October 2026

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https://doi.org/10.5782/2223-2621.1610
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power and cultural identity or as an expression of religious duty in scholarly studies that have mostly explored it from legal, feminist, political, anthropological, or sociological viewpoints (Alqahtani, 2026). Although these viewpoints have significantly expanded scholarly knowledge, they often examine the hijab within discrete disciplinary contexts, leading to disjointed interpretations that ignore its spatial and embodied aspects. As a result, there has been inadequate research into how Muslim women's lived experiences with the hijab actively build, negotiate, and modify holy and social places.

Recent studies in the spatial humanities have underlined the significance of space not just as a physical environment, but also as a socially and culturally generated phenomenon that changes identities, meanings, and power dynamics (Mukwidigwi and Naidu, 2026). Critical spatial theory, based on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, views space as an integrated interplay of observed (Perceived space/ Firstspace), imagined (Conceived space/ Secondspace), and experienced realities (Lived space/ Thirdspace) (Espinosa-Rodríguez, Caro-Rojas, and Ion, 2026). Although this theoretical framework is progressively being used in studies of religion, holy landscapes, and identity formation, insufficient studies have explicitly examined the Islamic hijab through this Critical spatial theory. Existing literature viewed the hijab as a spatial practice that creates body limits, creates holy space, and mediates relationships between Muslim women and their larger social surroundings (Khemilat, 2021). It is a theoretical exclusion, so we can't extrapolate further than the dichotomy of oppression/emancipation, private/public, and religious/emancipation (Laborde, 2006).

The designed research aims to research this gap by providing a critical spatial interpretation of the concept of "borders of cloth" of the Islamic hijab, which defines a Muslim woman's body as a sacred space without excluding her from public space. The study argues that the hijab is not only a material garment or a religious obligation, but that its significance is negotiated at various levels: it is both a place of physical sanctity and a place of religious identity; it is a place of social agency and a place of religious identity; and a place of physical sanctity and a place of social agency (Kosari and Amoori, 2018).

This article achieves a complete conceptual framework by synthesizing the notion of sacred space in Islam, Lefebvre's spatial triad, and Soja's Thirdspace. It demonstrates the interplay between the physical, symbolic, and lived aspects of space in relation to the hijab. This work builds on existing conversations in religious studies, spatial theory, and Islamic studies and contributes to the investigation of the embodiment of religious practices through critical spatial theory. This investigation adds three significant contributions to the literature; It contributes to critical spatial theory by illustrating how embodied religious rituals actively create holy spatialities rather than just inhabiting existing locations (Knott, 2011). Moreover, it offers a conceptually integrated understanding of the hijab that goes beyond reductionist political and cultural narratives by locating it in an Islamic worldview of location, embodiment, and spatial orientation. Further, it adds to wider questions about religion in modern heterogeneous cultures by demonstrating how holy identities are constantly formed via ordinary spatial behaviours (Özışık, 2026). Altogether, these provide a more sophisticated account of the Islamic hijab as a shifting spatiality, where its significance extends beyond the garment to the dynamic relationship between body, place, identity and religious meaning in contemporary society.

Methodology

Research design

This study is conducted using a qualitative conceptual research model and a critical spatial theory approach to explore the Islamic headscarf as a multidimensional geographical

phenomenon. This paper does not just consider the headscarf as a religious need, cultural practice, or political sign but also proposes a theoretical understanding by integrating the notions of space and philosophy with Islamic epistemology. The aim here is not to explore causal connections in a scientific way, but to offer an interdisciplinary perspective that can help to elucidate how the hijab can be a physical barrier, a symbolic signifier, and a spatial practice simultaneously. This is particularly important because the area being explored is a topic that creates meaning, identity, sacredness, and spatial experience, and therefore cannot be well understood with positivist or empirical methods. The research takes an interpretivist philosophical approach, claiming that religious practices gain meaning from historically placed social experiences, cultural traditions, and theological understandings (Taşkın, 2026). Within this paradigm, knowledge is considered as socially and culturally created rather than objectively measured. As a result, the approach prioritises interpretation, contextualisation, and theoretical integration above hypothesis testing or statistical generalization, as illustrated in Fig. 1.

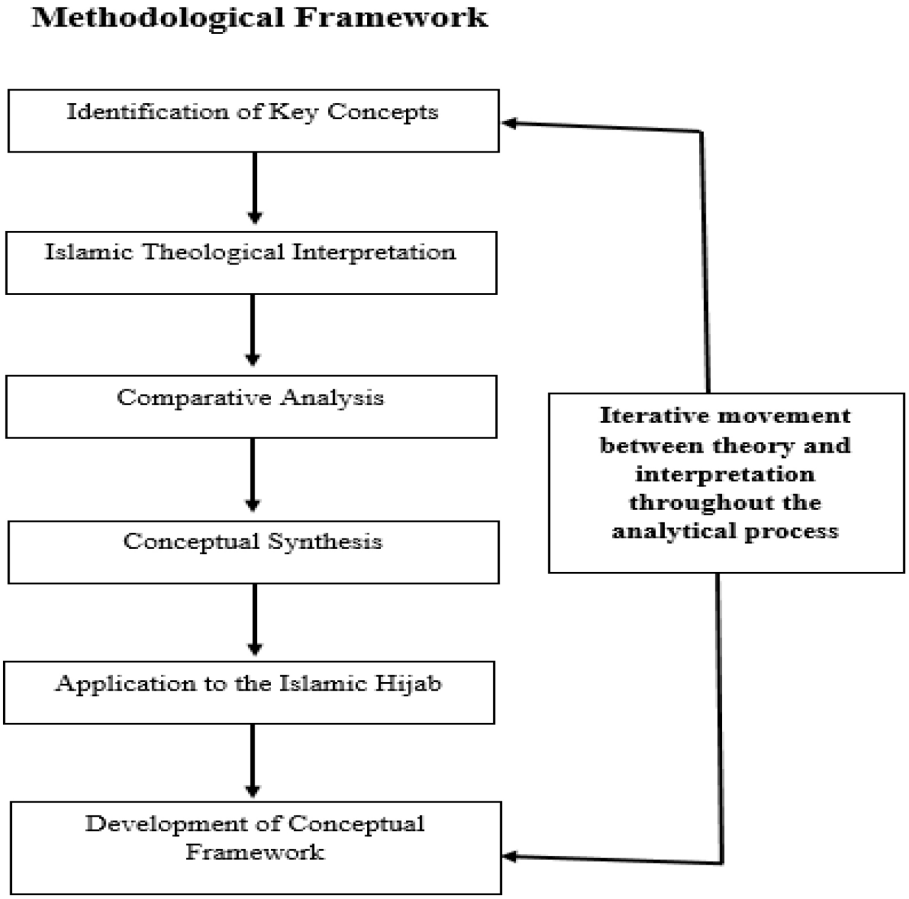


Fig. 1. Flow chart depicting theoretical framework.

Analytical framework

The analytical framework is based on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad and Edward Soja's Thirdspace theory, which are supplemented by Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia

and Yi-Fu Tuan's phenomenology of place and lived experience (Mechlenborg and Neergaard, 2024). These perspectives give a multifaceted knowledge of space as it is seen, conceptualised, and experienced.

In this model, the hijab is viewed in three interrelated spatial dimensions. Primarily the hijab is evaluated in terms of Firstspace, which represents its material and bodily existence as body-covering apparel. Further, it is examined as Secondspace, which reflects the conceptual and theological meanings acquired from the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic law, and the larger Islamic intellectual heritage. Lastly, the hijab is seen as Thirdspace, where religious belief, embodied practice, identity development, and ordinary social interaction come together to create lived holy space. This trialectical framework allows for a comprehensive interpretation that goes beyond reductionist political, cultural, or gender-centered interpretations of the hijab (Table 1).

Table 1. Secondary qualitative data pertinent to the hijab's spatial interpretation.

Findings from Bin Nafisah (2015)	Relevance to designed spatial framework	Theoretical connection
Participants connected religious significance with Muslim attire.	Beyond its tangible appearance, the hijab has a conceptual and theological component.	Secondspace (Lefebvre)
The hijab, according to the contestants, is a part of who they are.	Religious identity manifests itself.	Thirdspace (Soja)
The choice to wear a hijab was mentioned by the contributors.	Hijab may incorporate lived experience and agency.	Thirdspace (Soja)
Contributors connected the hijab to self-assurance and pride.	The body is used to perceive religious meaning.	Livedspace or embodiment (Soja/ Tuan)
Respondents believed that wearing clothes provided safety.	Clothing can serve as a barrier between one's body and privacy.	Spatial boundary
Participants encountered prejudice and stereotyping	In social settings, the meaning of the headscarf is negotiated.	Contested/ rational space
Reactions from non-Muslim individuals varied, according to participants.	Depending on the social situation, spatial significance varies.	Thirdspace (Soja)
Participants shared their experiences in Western (public) backgrounds.	The hijab acts as a mediator between public space and embodied identity.	Public/ lived space

Data sources

The analysis depends only on documentary and textual data (Trundle and Phillips, 2025). Primary religious sources include Qur'anic verses and confirmed Prophetic traditions on modesty, holy space, and Islamic behaviour. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic publications, ancient and modern Islamic studies, and seminal works in critical spatial theory. Special attention is paid to the works of academics whose work has influenced contemporary debates on space, embodiment, boundaries, religion and identity, such as Lefebvre, Soja, Foucault, Tuan, El Guindi, Knott and others. The literature was selected based on three criteria: firstly, the sources had to make a significant contribution to the theory of space or to the study of Islam. Secondly, those that were well referenced and peer-reviewed from the world's recognised academic presses or journals were given priority. Thirdly, the literature needs to directly inform the understanding of the connection between holy space, embodiment, boundaries, identity and Muslim religious practice.

Analytical procedure

The analysis process was a structured qualitative interpretative method, comprising four phases; The critical spatial theory literature was reviewed to identify essential notions related to location, space, embodiment, boundaries, sacredness and identity. After which, these ideas were contrasted with Islamic theological views based on the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence and classical Islamic scholarship. Then, conceptual synthesis was used to link spatial theory with Islamic epistemology, resulting in commonalities and complementary viewpoints. Lastly, the synthesized framework was utilized to reinterpret the Islamic hijab as a spatial practice that creates a space for the development of holy identity, as well as for symbolic boundaries and social participation. This was a cyclical analytical process that sought to ensure that there was ongoing interchange between the theoretical and the religious, and that neither Western spatial theory nor Islamic theology was privileged over the other. Rather, both knowledge traditions were employed as complementary analytical instruments to gain an understanding of the pluralistic importance of the hijab.

Ensuring theoretical rigor

The above-mentioned conceptually driven research increases its validity due to the application of methodological triangulation by employing multiple theories and documents. The combination of several different theories and approaches to the phenomenon being discussed – critical spatial theory, the phenomenology of place, religious geography, and Islamic theology allows diminishing the reliance of the research on one particular approach to the problem and increasing the conceptual validity. The analytical validity of the research is provided by making explicit the underlying assumptions that are used as the theoretical bases for the interpretation at the corresponding levels and by grounding all the conceptual assumptions in academic and Islamic literature. Rather than achieving statistical validity or empirical generalization, the research achieves analytical generalization as the offered conceptual framework is useful in future studies of the same issues.

Theoretical perspectives on place, space, and spatial orientation

There have been major changes that have occurred in the perception of location and space over the last few decades. In positivist traditions, the approach towards space was that it was either an object of study for geographers and scientists or a geometric construct used by architects and planners. Such binary conceptualisations thought that space existed independently of social interactions, and hence served only as a passive background for human activity. By presenting space as a socially generated reality that both forms and is affected by cultural practices, political power, and historical processes, the rise of the spatial turn throughout the late 20th century profoundly challenged this premise (Kambunga et al., 2023). As a result, critical spatiality contends that spatial configurations are dynamic social constructions that are constantly used to negotiate identities, injustices, and meaning systems rather than neutral containers.

Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja were among the most prominent contributors to critical spatial theory (Kambunga et al., 2023). They reconceptualised space as an active feature of social activity. Foucault's concept of heterotopia challenged modernist assumptions by illustrating how cultures create alternate places capable of opposing established social hierarchies and allowing for diverse types of social interaction.

Extending this viewpoint, (Kambunga et al., 2023) said that each civilisation creates its own place via the interplay of material practices, conceptual representations, and lived experiences. His spatial triad—perceived space, conceived space, and experienced space shows how physical settings, institutional knowledge, and daily experiences are interconnected rather than isolated variables. Building on Lefebvre's work, (Kambunga et al., 2023) established the notion of Thirdspace, which combines tangible and imagined spaces into a lived arena where prevailing power systems may be challenged and alternative social realities created. All these viewpoints together direct attention from the study of space based on only physical geography towards a relational, political, and cultural definition of space. The critical spatial approach allows an adequate theoretical framework for studying how different cultures understand their physical and social borders. Instead of defining such dichotomies as holy/ profane, public/ private, or clean/ dirty as stable categories, critical spatiality emphasizes the contextuality of their existence. Space is constantly being redefined through culturally constructed practices, institutions, and interactions among people, and therefore one and the same place may carry various, even contradictory, meanings at the same time.

Hijab in islamic context

The hijab holds a controversial and intricate place in the identity construction of Muslim women in various global contexts. In the Islamic sources, the discussion of modesty and proper dressing of women is based on the references to the commandments of the Qur'an about modesty and appearance in the world. Surah An-Nur (24:31) states that believers' women must keep their modesty and cover their breasts with *khumur*, while Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59) calls to put their garments (*jalabib*) around themselves. Besides, the Qur'an also uses the term *hijab* for the concept of separation in the verse Surah Al-Ahzab (33:53). Hence, it is vital to note the difference between the modern and classical usage of the word as it appears in the holy books. It is also possible to refer to several other sources on the hijab such as Al-Tabari's *Jamiᶜ al-Bayan*, Al-Qurtubi's *Al-Jamiᶜ li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Ibn Kathir's *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-ᶜAzim*. Moreover, one may look at the hadith collections like *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* with the information about modesty, proper dress, and participation of women in the early Muslim community. Thus, one is able to situate the concept of hijab into a broader context of modesty, religion, community and society in Islam.

In general, from the perspective of the identity construction, such background allows understanding the modern Muslim women's interpretation of the hijab as a practice. The hijab may become an outward symbol of religious devotion, cultural identity, moral values, and personal self-definition. At the same time, its meaning may be influenced by the expectations of family members, cultural values of the community, national culture, as well as broader discourse about Islam and womanhood in the society. However, the Islamic tradition in the works of Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, and Al-Qurtubi proves that the discussion of modesty and women's dress has always occurred in the context of religion and society and was not an abstract phenomenon. Nevertheless, contemporary Muslim women are not necessarily experiencing hijab in the same way since its meaning is different depending on the country, generation, social class, and cultural background. Consequently, the research of the hijab as an identity construction practice allows moving beyond the opposition between hijab as an oppression or hijab as a freedom and analyzing how Muslim women negotiate religious affiliation, personal agency, culture, and social recognition through this practice.

Hijab for muslim girl

While Hijab is a religious, cultural and identity practice of Muslim girls and women, it cannot be understood from a single cultural or ideological perspective. The principles of modesty and of proper public behavior are expressed in Islamic sources mainly in the Qur'ani discourse on modesty and proper public behavior, which is known as maya 'haya' (modesty).

"Believing women are commanded to be modest, to cover their bosoms (Qur'an, 24:31) and to cover themselves with the outer garment (Qur'an, 33:59)".

The following verses have been studied in detail by classical scholars of the Qurʾan, such as Al-Tabari's Jamiʾ al-Bayan, Ibn Kathir's Tafsir al-Qurʾan al-ʾAzim and al-Qurtubi's Al-Jamiʾ li-Ahkam al-Qurʾan. Moreover, there are reports about modesty, clothing and the behavior of Muslim women during the prophetic era in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. These sources create hijab and modesty as part of a larger Islamic context of religious practice and behavior. Modern knowledges of hijab, however, go beyond the religious prescription: Muslim girls experience a variety of family, school, cultural and social landscapes in which the meaning of religious dress is continually negotiated and interpreted.

Hijab can thus be regarded as a form of identity that can be seen and felt, in which Muslim girls are building, articulating and interacting with their religious and social identity. Hijab may signal religious identity and commitment, and may also serve to become an expression of cultural identity, family norms, values and conceptions of Muslim womanhood. It is important to note that the Qur'anic framework is not indicative of how all Muslim girls experience hijab but, rather, a religious context for their individual identity formation. Girls' experiences of hijab may differ in various Muslim communities depending on the social norms, peer groups, schools, media portrayals, and country environments in which they live. Hijab, accordingly, offers useful empirical insights to understand the construction of religious identity at the intersection of faith, agency, culture and social recognition. Such a shift will go beyond merely seeing hijab as a sign of oppression or freedom, but rather regard Muslim girls as agents of negotiation in the process of making hijab visible in an evolving global social environment.

Space, embodiment, bordering, and othering

In Yi-Fu Tuan's approach to space as an experiential process, the relationship between space and human experience is furthered (Olsson et al., 2012). According to Tuan, reality consists not only of objective space but also of its interpretation via emotional, cultural, and physical interactions with places. Therefore, human experience turns physical spaces into places filled with memories, values, identities, and emotions. In the analysis provided by (Olsson et al., 2012) it becomes clear that the human body is the primary frame of reference in terms of understanding directions, distances, orientations, and affiliation.

According to critical spatial theory, spatial organization is inextricably linked to bordering and othering processes (Olsson et al., 2012). Social groups create symbolic and material boundaries that separate insiders and outsiders, reinforcing collective identities while also legitimising exclusion. The constraints do not stop at physical geographic boundaries but can also be found within cultural stories, institutional conventions, religious doctrines, and daily social interactions. Spaces, therefore, become places where power relations are negotiated, and identities constructed continuously. The approach becomes highly relevant when looking into cultural and religious practices such as wearing of

the headscarf, which cannot be explained through external and Western ideas of secular space. These actions must be viewed against the socio-cultural and religious space contexts, wherein physical practice, spatial standards, and symbolism are used in the construction of the perception of identity, belongingness, and social engagement. In combination, the theoretical contributions of Foucault, Lefebvre, Soja, and Tuan give rise to a complex model, where space is understood in terms of being physical, symbolic, lived and political. The combined approach provides a sound theoretical background to understand how spatial practices create social identities, social interaction, and cultural norms, among other things. In contrast to treating space as a passive environment, contemporary critical theory views space as an active agent creating, challenging and recreating social reality.

Worldviews, spatial orientation, and the social production of space

Modern-day theories on space have led to a radical departure from the notion that space is a neutral physical reality into a socially constructed, culturally constituted and politically negotiated concept. Previous theories about space were rooted in positivism, using a dichotomous approach where space was differentiated into physical objective space, studied by geographers and scientists, and representational space, used predominantly by architects and urban planners. While the dualistic paradigm stressed materiality and objectivity, it failed to account for the processes whereby human experience, culture, and politics influence the creation of meaning within space. The spatial turn revolutionized the traditional approach by showing that space is inherently linked to social practices and the cultural production of meaning.

These theorists have immensely contributed towards this reconceptualization (Borch, 2002). Foucault rejected the idea of determinism and homogeneity of spatial arrangements within modernist spatial theory by introducing the concepts of utopia and heterotopia to prove how societies constantly produce alternative spaces that have the potential to destabilize existing knowledges and power structures (Van Lanen and Meij, 2026). These "other spaces" are present within and outside dominant social orders, providing a means for negotiation, resistance and different forms of social interaction. The criticism of Foucault was enhanced by (Trundle and Phillips, 2025) who introduced the concept of social constitution of space through dialectic relations among the three dimensions of space: visible, imaginary and experiential. The triangle of space provided by them shows the intrinsic relation between the material environment and the symbolic representation and experience of space since each dimension influences and transforms the other dimensions. Trundle and Phillips have used the concept of Thirdspace introduced by Lefebvre to provide a space that combines imagination with reality in order to accommodate conflicting identities, ideologies, and practices.

The research conducted by Binu and Kuriakose (2026) is a development of critical spatial theory through a phenomenological approach where the argument is that lived experience as opposed to objective experience, is what creates the foundation of spatial meaning. Humans create spaces through memory, emotions, culture, and interaction instead of inhabiting them.

Thus, the perception of space in this respect is not only socially conditioned but also highly subjective. In line with Tuan's theory by Tuan, the human body itself can serve as the main reference point for interpreting orientation, directionality, distance and affiliation. In other words, people should consider that reality is mediated by interpretation and emotion and not an objective experience only.

The concept of the psychic border suggested by Bloomer and defining the body as the essential center of spatial orientation represents further development of the connection between embodiment and the spatial structuring. Bloomer claims that in fact, people create elastic psychological borders organizing their perceptions in terms of direction, hierarchy and motion as well as separating themselves and their bodies from the surrounding world. In such a way, spatial categories like front-back, left-right or up-down serve as the established symbolic structures employed by civilizations to allocate meanings to power, morality, visibility and social position. In this regard, the embodiment knowledge about spatial orientation being both biological, psychological and sociocultural adds new dimensions to the phenomenological theory by Tuan.

Therefore, critical spatiality offers an essential theoretical base to analyze how the cultures build symbolic borders dividing the spheres of the sacred and profane, public and private, insiders and outsiders. It means that the geographical divisions should be seen as socially constructed notions changing according to different historical and cultural periods. Hence, the interaction of institutional practices, religious belief, culture and everyday life produce spatial meanings. It is especially important when dealing with the Islamic spatial constructs since spatial practices in this case cannot be fully explained from outside using the Western and secular approaches. Instead, it requires analysis of physical environment, religious symbols, embodied practices and collective identity together.

Based on the theory, Islam represents a complex spatial system that includes lived experience, mental imagery, and the material reality. The notion of Islamic spatiality, using trialectics of Lefebvre and the concept of Thirdspace of Soja, involves more than physical locations as a combination of beliefs, moral values, collective identity, and embodied religion that together form Muslim experiences of everyday life (Kosari and Amoori, 2018). As sources of theology, the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic tradition not only involve spatial and cognitive constructions but also organize the interactions between people, collectives, and the sacred. Thus, Islamic worldviews create unique spatial orientations to interpret the ideas of identity, modesty, justice, belonging, and accountability.

In general, critical spatial theory explains that space is constantly produced by the relations of the physical context, symbolism, embodied activity, and social interaction, and not only is defined physically or conceptualized cognitively. An inclusive theoretical framework to study the impact of spatial constructions on the process of identity formation, bordering activities, social inclusion/exclusion, and the reproduction of religious and cultural worldviews has been developed through the integration of the ideas of Foucault, Lefebvre, Soja, Tuan, and Bloomer.

Islamic constructions of lived space: A critical spatial perspective

A useful analytical framework for comprehending how Islamic ideas of space go beyond traditional divisions between the material and the symbolic, the private and the public, and the holy and the secular is provided by critical spatial theory. Islamic spatiality displays a relational and dynamic worldview in which spatial meanings are continually formed via common religious practices, group rituals, and physical experiences, as opposed to seeing these categories as mutually incompatible. The study of (Gholamhosseini et al., 2019), contends that Western liberal ideas of privacy, which place a strong emphasis on individual liberty and spatial separation, are insufficient to understand Islamic space. Rather, in Islamic civilisations, privacy is a spatial concept that is culturally rooted and characterised by relationality, fluidity, and ongoing interaction between people, communities, and the holy. As a result, holy space in Islam is constantly created by religious performance rather

of being limited to specific physical sites, enabling Muslims to use ritual practice to convert everyday surroundings into places with spiritual significance. Lefebvre's idea of lived space, in which social actions actively create spatial realities rather of just inhabiting pre-existing physical settings, is closely aligned with this viewpoint.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand how physical settings, religious symbols, and embodied behaviours combine to produce Islamic lived space. Drawing on Soja's idea of Thirdspace and Lefebvre's spatial triad, Islamic spatiality encompasses lived experiences and cognitive representations that together determine religious identity in addition to material contexts (Putra, Soemardiono, and Santoso, 2026). Daily prayers, worship services, and pilgrimages show how holy spaces are created by rituals on a continuous basis and are not inherently linked to particular locations. The mosque is an integral part of the religion; yet, Islamic spatiality makes it clear that any space can become sacred by means of ritual practice. Sacredness emerges from the interaction of both ritual and space, and does not emerge solely from physical characteristics.

What characterizes Islamic space is the rhythmical combination of sacred and profane time. In Islam, there is no separation of religious observances from everyday practices. The five daily prayers, Friday assembly, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the annual pilgrimage become cycles of rhythm where the Muslims make transitions between everyday and sacred space. Rhythms provide Muslims with an understanding of space that enables them to engage both in their spirituality and identity as Muslims in their geographically diverse contexts. The idea of space as opposed to secular notions that separate religion into particular settings and moments is embedded in the regular cycle of daily routines.

Embodiment represents an important part of the theory under discussion. Religious ceremonies not only transmit a certain theological message, but actively transform physical acts into means for building sacred space. Via repetitive movements, orientation towards the Kaaba, purification rituals and worshipping practices, the body becomes a locus for religious identity and reproduction of spatial meanings. These acts, according to phenomenological theories of embodiment, prove the fact that religious space is experienced not only cognitively, but physically and emotionally. The body becomes an essential means for transforming abstract religious beliefs into social reality. This approach expands the theory of lived space suggested by Lefebvre, arguing that spatial production takes place via religious acts of the body and not via institutions or buildings. A number of important conclusions may be drawn based on the critical theory outlined above regarding the spatial importance of the hijab. Under the critical spatial approach, the hijab cannot be viewed as just a piece of clothing or a political/ideological act. It symbolizes an embodied spatial practice of negotiating, reproducing and communicating sacred boundaries in everyday social spaces.

There are three spatial meanings associated with the hijab. Firstly, it refers to the physical garment worn; secondly, it refers to the symbolism of religious identity; thirdly, hijab refers to a lived negotiation of belonging, visibility, and moral agency on the part of Muslim women. Altogether, it can be noted that the significance of hijab derives from the confluence of religious doctrine, embodied practice, and sociocultural environment. Altogether, Islamic spatiality suggests the presence of holy space that continually evolves through social processes of ritual practice, embodiment, collective memory, and religious belief. Drawing on theories from Lefebvre, Soja, and critical spatial studies, it can be argued that Islamic spatial formations are inherently relational, dynamic, and performative (Ding et al., 2025). It is a strong theoretical framework for the exploration of spatial production of religious identities in contemporary societies, as well as provides a better insight into

the religious practices than the binary approaches that differentiate sacred/religious from secular/private and public.

Conclusions, implications and limitations

The current study further extends our awareness of the Islamic hijab as a material garment or a religious sign, by focusing on the hijab as a spatial practice, an embodied practice in which Muslim women are involved in an ongoing process of negotiation and negotiation of identity, agency, belonging, embodiment and religious values in various social settings. The study presents hijab in a multi-dimensional fashion based on Lefebvre's theory on the social production of space, Soja's theory on Thirdspace and critical spatial scholarship to show the dynamic relationship between religious practice and space. This perspective paints a picture of Islamic spatiality that is relational and integrative and rejects common western spatial binaries like sacred vs secular, public vs private, and religious vs political, showing how sacred meanings can be reproduced in public and everyday space via embodied religious practices. Therefore, the interpretation of hijab must be made based on the epistemological and socio-cultural context in which hijab is worn, and not based on any external values or cultural orientation. The results also show that hijab is a negotiated border that both safeguards religious identity and enables engagement in public life, as spaces can both divide and join in the ways they are embodied. The study proposes to go beyond reductive interpretations of hijab as oppressive or liberating, and draw attention to the way in which it can produce moral subjectivities, agency and belonging in a context-dependent way.

Overall, the study offers a significant contribution to critical geography, sociology of religion, and cultural studies by revealing that religion is not merely symbolically or institutionally constructed as a result of everyday spatial practices. 1st space, 2nd space, and 3rd space, therefore, provide a multidimensional perspective on the social production of space, but also on the embodiment, negotiation, and reproduction of meanings in religious practice in the contemporary world, building upon Lefebvre's social production of space. Comparisons of different migration experiences alongside longitudinal studies of the changing spatialities of the embodied lives of Muslim women could be used to further develop the framework in future research, in order to gain a deeper insight into the interplay between space, religious identity, embodiment, and social change, which can otherwise be a major limitation.

Author contribution

This paper has been authored by a single person.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

AI use statement

The author confirmed that no AI tools have been used for writing this paper.

Funding

No funding is available for this study.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest is reported for this study.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank Prince Sultan University for the technical support.

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