

# EMOTIONALLY NAKED: THE HIJAB, THE BODY, AND THE DUAL SIDE OF CULTURAL SHOCK BETWEEN MUSLIM WOMEN AND BRAZILIAN

EMOCIONALMENTE NUAS: O HIJAB, O CORPO E A DUPLA FACE DO  
CHOQUE CULTURAL ENTRE MULHERES MUÇULMANAS E BRASILEIRAS

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## **ABSTRACT**

The article examines dual aspects of cultural shock in Goiânia, Brazil, by assessing the lived experiences of Muslim refugee/immigrant women and the Brazilian cultural perspectives that accommodate them. This article uses 13 semi-structured, multi-perspective interviews to investigate how the female body, particularly the wearing of the hijab, serves as a crucial point for interpreting, negotiating, and discussing cultural differences. The results reveal a “double shock”: the internal displacement that refugees feel when they move to a society they typically characterize as “libertinism” and informality, and the exterior shock that Brazilians feel when they see religious piety. The research suggests that Brazilian hospitality is genuine. Yet, it often coexists with a “benevolent prejudice” born of ignorance, media-influenced misconceptions of oppression, and a false critique of Brazil's own moral principles.

**Keywords:** Cultural Shock; Muslim Women; Hijab; Brazilian's Perspectives; The Body.

## **RESUMO**

Este artigo examina os dois aspectos do choque cultural em Goiânia, Brasil, avaliando as experiências vividas por mulheres muçulmanas refugiadas/imigrantes e as perspectivas culturais brasileiras que as acolhem. O artigo utiliza 13 entrevistas semiestruturadas e multiperspectivas para investigar como o corpo feminino, particularmente o uso do hijab, serve como ponto crucial para interpretar, negociar e discutir diferenças culturais. Os resultados revelam um “duplo choque”: o deslocamento interno que as refugiadas sentem ao se mudarem para uma sociedade que geralmente caracterizam como “libertária” e informal, e o choque externo que os brasileiros sentem ao presenciarem a piedade religiosa. A pesquisa sugere que a hospitalidade brasileira é genuína.

No entanto, ela frequentemente coexiste com um “preconceito benevolente” nascido da ignorância, de concepções errôneas de opressão influenciadas pela mídia e de uma falsa crítica aos próprios princípios morais do Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Choque Cultural; Mulheres Muçulmanas; Hijab; Perspectivas Brasileiras; O Corpo.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Brazil has witnessed an influx of immigrants and refugees for decades, a movement that has had a profound impact on its culture, food, economy, and other social dimensions (TARGET, 2025). However, the most compelling shift has been the arrival of female refugees and migrants from Islamic countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This arrival has generated a major cultural shock within Brazilian society. The presence of a woman wearing a veil (hijab), a long black dress (abaya), or even a face covering (niqab) inside a space that is deeply Christian-coded and accustomed to a free, exposed, and almost naked bodily culture is inevitably met with discrimination, unusual reactions, and strange or lingering looks. These arrivals have led to close, often tense interactions across diverse ways of living, embodiment, and gendered identities in public spaces.

These encounters take place within global narratives of displacement, Islamophobia, Orientalism, and the queerness of Muslim femininity, as well as in Brazil's own paradoxical self-image: a nation that simultaneously celebrates diversity and hospitality while perpetuating subtle and enduring prejudices towards what is deemed “foreign” or “alien.” Refugee and immigrant women carry with them not only the memories of displacement but also religious

practices and embodied habits that shape how they are seen, judged, welcomed, or rejected in Brazilian society. In Brazilian culture, the body serves as symbolic capital, in contrast to the modest dress of Muslim women, even more pronounced (GOLDENBERG, 2007). So, the body becomes the leading site for interpreting, negotiating, and, at times, contesting cultural differences (GRIERSON, 2009).

These embodied differences are especially amplified in places like Goiânia, where the social environment is shaped by Christian norms, informal bodily practices, and a public culture that naturalizes exposure, touch, and sensuality. For Muslim women, whose body image is frequently based on modesty, privacy, and ritual cleanliness, this atmosphere becomes a continual source of contention. For Brazilians, the advent of visibly Muslim women challenges deeply held beliefs about femininity, autonomy, marriage, motherhood, and religious morality.

In refugee studies, the friction generated by this encounter is often analyzed through the lens of acculturation, which is defined not merely as shock, but as acculturative stress, a profound emotional and cognitive adjustment to a new environment that challenges an individual's identity (BERRY, 1997). However, for practicing Muslim women, this cultural shock happens under two interconnected levels. The first level is the internal shock, experienced as they navigate a new cultural setting while trying to maintain religious and embodied practices. Level two is called the external shock, in which Brazilian society interprets, evaluates, or questions the visible expressions of faith.

This duality creates what some authors call an “embodied border,” a living frontier marked on the skin, in clothing, and in gesture. The women interviewed frequently describe the body as the first site of conflict, meaning that it attracts looks, questions, and comments long before language is exchanged. For them, the cultural shock happens not in a single moment, but through repeated little moments, a gaze that fights between curiosity, stereotypes, benevolence, and judgment. Likewise, Brazilians face their own symbolic shock: their assumptions about freedom, gender, and modernity are unsettled when confronted with a veiled woman whose presence contradicts national narratives of informality and liberalism.

This article explores the specific duality of cultural shock, the lived experiences of Muslim refugee and immigrant women, and the perceptions of Brazilian spectators who view them as different. Its goal is to understand how visibly Islamic symbols, such as the headscarf (hijab), modest attire (abaya), and public prayer, influence interactions between these women and Brazilians. Through a multi-perspective, semi-structured interview methodology, this study explores how religious embodiment, visibility, and public expressions of faith mediate everyday interactions. Focusing on the term “body” allows us to evaluate how the practices and clothing of Muslim refugees and immigrants can be interpreted as signs of oppression, exoticism, danger, or moral differences, yet also as markers of strength, dignity, and resilience.

### **1.1. Research Question And Objectives**

Driven by these tensions, the central research question guiding this study is: How do Muslim refugee and immigrant women in Brazil

experience cultural shock and prejudice while practicing their religion, and conversely, how do Brazilians perceive visible expressions of faith, such as the hijab?

To answer this, the article's primary goal is to analyze how cultural shock manifests in the body and through visible religious practices.

The specific objectives are:

- To understand how these Muslim refugee/immigrant women perceive their experiences of difference and adaptation in Brazil.
- To analyze how Brazilians construct interpretations of the visibly Muslim refugee/immigrant women.
- To identify the forms of prejudice, stereotypes, or acceptance arising from these encounters.
- To compare these two sides to identify gaps, misconceptions, and opportunities for greater understanding.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research Design And Data Collection**

To examine the dual nature of cultural shock, this research adopted a qualitative, interpretive approach. The use of this methodology is grounded in the need to access participants' lived experiences and capture the tiny yet important details that quantitative methods often miss. In this study, cultural shock is understood not simply as an individual psychological reaction, but as a sociological process

that unfolds through the interaction between those who are already established in a community and those who arrive as outsiders (ELIAS; SCOTSON, 2000).

The researcher chose the city of Goiânia, Goiás, as the study field, a metropolitan center that has recently become a hub for refugee resettlement. Data construction took place through semi-structured interviews conducted with thirteen participants, divided into two distinct groups to mirror the bidirectional nature of the research question:

This study includes two participant groups: Group (a) consists of six Muslim refugee/immigrant women (MR1–MR6) from Egypt, Syria, and Afghanistan. Group (b) consists of seven Brazilian participants, male and female (B1–B7). The selection criterion for the Group (a) or MR was based on the visible practice of Islam (wearing the hijab/abaya/niqab) and refugee/immigrant status. The Group (b) or B was interviewed randomly as well as using snowball sampling. The Brazilians, or participants of the host society, were selected to provide an external perspective on Muslim women's presence.

All interviews were conducted during the first two weeks of November 2025. To protect anonymity, participants were assigned numerical codes, and interview excerpts are cited in-text using these codes and the interview year. As these interviews are confidential and not publicly accessible, they are not included in the reference list.

Interview durations varied between these two groups, with group A (MR) lasting around forty minutes to one hour, and group B lasting between 20 minutes and 35 minutes. All interviews were recorded

with the consent of the interviewees, then transcribed and analyzed manually. During the interviews, notes were taken to document facial expressions, changes in tone, hesitations, and emotional intensity, particularly when topics such as hijab, religion, stereotypes, or Brazilian culture were discussed.

## **2.2. Data Analysis**

Braun and Clarke's Thematic coding approach was applied to identify recurring patterns of meaning. This strategy was implemented through repeated reading, open coding, and code clustering (BRAUN; CLARKE, 2006). Instead of focusing on and seeking a singular truth, the study aimed to highlight both the similarities and the differences across the narratives. The key themes included: "safety," "body," "hijab," "Halal," "fear," "pity," "sexualization," "freedom," "ignorance," "libertinism," "shock," and "identity."

Beyond these codes, the analysis also focused on non-verbal signs recorded and later transcribed, such as silence, sighs, laughs, getting serious by raising the voice slightly, and blushing while mentioning one of their experiences. Some participants used the cross-cultural connotations of certain Arabic and Dari terms, as did others, who contrasted internal (Muslim women) and external (Brazilians) perspectives.

The ultimate purpose of the analysis was not just to classify facts, but also to comprehend the emotional, moral, and symbolic qualities of each narrated moment.

## **2.3. Ethical Considerations And Safety Measures**

Given the sensitivity of the refugee population and the sensitive nature of the themes covered (displacement, discrimination, and religious identity), rigorous ethical guidelines were followed.

First, all participants provided informed consent. Special effort was taken to ensure that the refugee women understood that the research was academic and independent, with no ties to any government or immigration organization. They were advised that they might decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without punishment.

Second, the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees were crucial. Considering that the Muslim women's community in Goiânia is tiny and could be recognized, all names and addresses have been removed. The alphanumeric coding method (MR/B) was employed to ensure that no single quote could be linked back to a person in a way that jeopardized their safety or social position.

Finally, cultural and emotional safety were prioritized, and interviews were conducted in the participants' chosen locations, where they felt safe. For Muslim women, it was mostly their homes or the mosque (Masjid); for Brazilians, it was either their homes, their workplaces, or a quiet corner in a shopping mall. The researcher remained aware of signs of discomfort or trauma, listening with a receptive posture and prioritizing the participant's well-being and safety.

### **3. STATE OF THE ART: THE SHOCK, STIGMA, AND THE ORIENTALIST GAZE**

To understand the complex choreography of gazes and bodies in Goiânia, this study moves beyond a single theoretical lens, weaving

together frameworks of migration, embodiment, and post-colonial critique. The analysis is grounded first in the concept of body as capital. In Brazilian culture, the body represents more than just the biological; it is a form of symbolic capital continually negotiated in public spaces. The body in Brazil is a central element of identity construction and is frequently associated with exposure and visibility (GOLDENBERG, 2007). As a result, the covered body of a muslim woman becomes a source of significant cultural tensions, interpreted, negotiated, and at times contested by the host society.

To analyze the issues arising from this interaction, we use the concept of acculturation. While early ideas focused on “shock,” Berry redefined this experience as acculturative stress, a significant emotional and cognitive adjustment to a new environment resulting from the absence of familiar cultural cues. This approach enables us to understand “shock” not as a passing fear to be conquered, but as a continuous, everyday negotiation of identity in a culture that interprets bodies via a profoundly different moral language (BERRY, 1997).

This dialogue leads us to the core dispute of the research: the gap between the Muslim woman's self-perception and external perception. To understand her internal world, we turn to Saba Mahmood. She challenges the Western liberal assumption that agency is synonymous with resistance to tradition. Instead, she argues that for many Muslim women, agency means being able to follow Islamic rules to become a more devout person. From this perspective, the hijab is not an instrument of oppression, but rather, it is a technology of the self. This deliberate and intentional practice offers spiritual comfort or “safety,” as our participants indicate, in the face of the turmoil of exile (MAHMOOD, 2005).

Whereas, the internal act of piety of the Muslim women clashes with the external reality of Brazilian public life, so, Goffman's theory of stigma comes into play as he describes how a visible trait, in this example, the veil, can operate as a stigma sign, discrediting the bearer in the eyes of the majority and reducing her from a whole person to a representation of a group. The tension management described by Goffman is evident in every interaction in which a refugee woman feels compelled to smile, explain herself, or prove she is “safe” to a wary Brazilian public (GOFFMAN, 1988).

To comprehend the Brazilian response characterized by a blend of terror and “benevolent pity,” we utilize Edward Said's notion of Orientalism and Lila Abu-Lughod's critique of the Western inclination to save Muslim women. Even here, in Brazil, a country far from the Arab world, the imagined geography of the Arabian Peninsula has a significant effect (SAID, 2007; ABU-LUGHOD, 2013). Brazilian locals frequently see these women via clichés propagated by the media, simplifying intricate beings to mere victims in need of emancipation from their own society. This theoretical triangulation among the mentioned authors provides the essential depth for analyzing the unequal interactions occurring on the streets of Goiânia, Brazil. In addition to these classical frameworks, contemporary anthropological approaches help illuminate the everyday negotiations of refugee women. Talal's critique of the colonial encounter helps contextualize why Brazilian society positions itself as culturally advanced in relation to Islamic norms (ASAD, 1990).

Finally, authors such as Al-Ali and Brun emphasize the emotional dimensions of displacement, reminding us that cultural shock is not

merely intellectual but also embodied, temporal, and deeply felt (AL-ALI, 2019; BRUN,2016).

## **4. INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSIS: THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF SHOCK**

### **4.1. The Brazilian Spectacle: A Shock For The Refugee/immigrant**

Brazil presents a sensory overload that conflicts with the Muslim women's embodied habits of modesty. For the interviewed Muslim women, the shock is not merely geographical but also moral and visual. MR1, who arrived from Syria nine years ago, describes her initial impression of Brazil as a paradox. She found the friendliness of the Brazilian people comforting; however, she was deeply uncomfortable with the "presence of alcohol everywhere" and the way people dressed (MR1, INTERVIEW, 2025). The same feeling was shared by MR2, a young mother who arrived in Brazil just 4 months ago from Egypt, who describes a shocking experience of witnessing a scene of public intimacy from her apartment window. While her face flushes, she recalls thinking, "This happens in bedrooms, behind closed doors, not here, highlighting a tremendous disconnect between her private values and the Brazilian public sphere (MR2, INTERVIEW, 2025). For some of these women, the "public space" in Brazil seems intrusive.

Some women describe the first months in Brazil as a period of constant challenge and negotiation, where every trip to a supermarket or the bus stop became an exercise in navigating looks, comments, and internal discomfort. Several Muslim women expressed feeling that Brazil was "open," "kind," and "friendly," yet also "too free," "too exposed," or "too noisy" (MR1; MR3; MR5; MR6, INTERVIEW, 2025). These different judgements reflect the complex

emotional layers of cultural shock, fear, adoration, discomfort, and adaptability, all occurring simultaneously.

#### **4.2. The Veiled Body: A Shock For The Brazilian**

Conversely, for the Brazilian participants, the presence of the Muslim women serves as a disruption for the visual landscape. B2, an IT technician, admits that, for him, seeing a woman in full traditional Islamic attire is “foreign” because Brazilians are accustomed to being “more exposed” (B2, INTERVIEW, 2025). He observes the automatic categorizing that occurs, “Aah, there is a person who is not from our country” (B2, INTERVIEW, 2025)

B4, a female student mentions that, “the first time I met a Muslim woman with hijab was in a mosque,” and she continues, “I felt terrified of her, wanting to ask so many questions as I was shocked as to why she was covered like that?”(B4, INTERVIEW, 2025).

B1, a local doctor, offers a critical perspective on the “Brazilian Shock.” He argues that because Brazil has a “liberal and libertine culture,” in which women often walk around “half naked,” the sight of modest clothing serves as a moral mirror (B1, INTERVIEW, 2025). He describes the reaction of the hijab as a “real shock” because it highlights the depravity of the local culture(B1, INTERVIEW, 2025). In this type of understanding, the Muslim women are not only distinct but also provide a counter-narrative to the Brazilian body norms.

For the participant, B5, a cultural agent, the first time seeing a “hijabi woman” was a “shock of reality”. The shock stemmed from the realization that the world is larger than the Brazilian context, challenging the insularity of local culture (B5, INTERVIEW, 2025). A well known lawyer, B7, confesses that “I have only seen the women

with full hijab on TV and social media” and if he ever gets to see one in person, his first reaction would be pure curiosity mixed with confusion: He shook his head and with a louder voice says, “I would ask them, why is she wearing that here?”(B7, INTERVIEW, 2025). These statements show that hijab is not neutral; it disrupts Brazilian visual expectations and demands an explanation.

Oftentimes, for the majority of Brazilians, the sight of the veil (hijab) produces a moral questioning. Interviewees often connected the hijab to ideas of oppression, extremism, or patriarchal control, interpretations drawn not from experience but from sensationalized media representations. At the same time, some Brazilians expressed admiration for the “discipline” and “dignity” of veiled women, illustrating the ambivalence with which Islamic modesty is perceived (B1; B2; B5; B7, INTERVIEW, 2025).

### **4.3. The First Interactions: Curiosity And The Awkwardness Of Touch**

These mutual shocks create a fragile space for the first interactions. B3, a social project worker, admits with brutal honesty that his first reaction to meeting a group of Muslim women, who were from Afghanistan, was fear. As he continued stuttering, he confessed, “MEU DEUS! I was scared.... I didn’t know how to communicate with them,” (B3, INTERVIEW, 2025). This fear was not necessarily about danger, but about the unknown: “an unknown fear of offending,” or the inability to bridge the cultural gap (B3, INTERVIEW, 2025).

This tension is most palpable in the ritual of the greeting. For Brazilians, the handshake or hug is a non-negotiable sign of warmth. However, for Muslim women, physical contact with unrelated men

except father/brother/husband/son, is religiously prohibited. MR3, a refugee from Afghanistan, recounts a moment of acute mutual cultural embarrassment when a Brazilian male guest offered her a handshake. "I shook it, later, he realized that culturally, and Islamically, we are not allowed to be touched other than by our husbands, fathers, or brothers," she explains. The man returned the next day to apologize profusely, saying that he "wouldn't have done it if he had known," she explains it with warmth in her face (MR3, INTERVIEW, 2025). Similarly, MR6, another Afghan woman, describes the pressure she felt when other Muslim women shook hands with the Brazilian men out of politeness. At the same time, she refused, causing Brazilians to ask, "You are also an Afghan, why do you refuse to shake hands or to be hugged? Do you think we are not clean enough?" (MR6, INTERVIEW, 2025). These instances show that the contact zone or touch is often a site of uncomfortable negotiation, and by refusing to be touched, you are labeled and misunderstood as cold rather than pious.

These first encounters provide a small example of the larger social dynamics examined in this article. They reveal how deeply Brazilian society relies on touch as a symbol of warmth, and how easily a lack of contact is misread as being cold. They also demonstrate how the Muslim women strive to strike a delicate balance between politeness and religious restrictions, often feeling the pressure to compromise or to explain themselves to avoid misconceptions. These situations reveal how much effort is needed by both groups to invest emotionally, for the Brazilians to attempt to avoid offending, and for the Muslim women trying to prevent their actions or intentions from being misunderstood.

## **5. FINDINGS AND RESULTS: NARRATIVES OF FAITH AND NEGOTIATION**

### **5.1. The Body as a Sanctuary: Reframing Agency And The Hijab**

Contemporary literature on the sociology of religion argues that agency in Islam should not be understood solely through the Western liberal lens of “resistance” to tradition (MAHMOOD, 2006). The interviews in this study strongly support this theoretical approach, rejecting the widely held Brazilian stereotypes of the oppressed women.

For the Muslim women interviewed, the hijab is more of an internal obligation, a “second skin,” rather than an external imposition essential for psychological and spiritual wellbeing. According to MR1, this bond has become a part of one’s personality, making them “feel emotionally naked without it, even in the heat of Brazil, especially Goiania.” (MR1, INTERVIEW, 2025). This statement dismantles the notion or belief that the (hijab) veil is merely a piece of cloth that can be removed to “liberate” the woman. For the participant, MR1, removing the hijab would be an act of exposure, not freedom (MR1, INTERVIEW, 2025).

The same sentiment is also repeated by MR2, who reframes the veil as a mechanism of security rather than restriction. Touching her headscarf, she explains, “I feel safe, I feel secure when I am wearing hijab,” noting that she checks the mirror meticulously before leaving home to ensure she is covered (MR2, INTERVIEW, 2025). In a new country where she feels vulnerable due to language barriers and cultural differences, the hijab serves as a portable sanctuary. This

mobile border defines her personal space and dignity in the public sphere( MR2, INTERVIEW, 2025).

Furthermore, the women explicitly reject the narrative of male coercion, a stereotype widely mentioned and told by the Brazilian participants. MR5 clarifies: “It is not something forced, it is something I choose.”(MR5, INTERVIEW, 2025). The participant, MR6, describes a conversation in which a Brazilian guest asked her whether she was obliged to wear a headscarf (hijab/chador) indoors in the heat. Her response was a declaration of autonomy: “No, I am comfortable. This isn't forced upon me, I chose this! This is my dignity, and I like this kind of thing, myself,” said with a sense of pride through her body language (MR6, INTERVIEW, 2025).

## **5.2. Benevolent Prejudice And Missionary Hospitality**

While overt hostility is rare, the interviews reveal that prejudice in Brazil is insidious, often masked as curiosity, pity, or what we might term “missionary hospitality.” (B4; B5; MR3; MR4; INTERVIEW, 2025). MR1 shares a painful memory of being on a bus when a man commented on her being a “mulher bomba” (female suicide bomber)(MR1, INTERVIEW, 2025). Similarly, MR5 recounts teenagers whispering “terrorista” (terrorist) as they passed her in a supermarket (MR5, INTERVIEW, 2025). These interactions reveal that for the Brazilian observer, the hijab is not just a religious garment but a geopolitical symbol.

More common than the terrorist label, however, is the gaze of pity. B1 articulates this clearly: “Most of the time, it’s making fun of someone and feeling sorry for them. They think that the person is suffering there” (B1, INTERVIEW, 2025). This form of prejudice is rooted in the

assumption that no woman would choose to cover herself; therefore, she must be oppressed.

Finally, prejudice also masks itself as hospitality with strings attached, mainly the invitation to convert. All the Muslim women interviewed reported that Brazilian kindness often comes with a caveat (MR1; MR2; MR3; MR4; MR5; MR6, INTERVIEW, 2025). MR6 recalls being frequently asked to participate in their worship and go to church. When she kept refusing their request, explaining her faith, the pressure persisted (MR6, INTERVIEW, 2025). This demonstrates a distinct Brazilian unwillingness to tolerate diversity without attempting to incorporate it. One of the participants, MR4, pleaded, “The desire is not for conversion but for coexistence: ‘Just let us live here and respect our religion, and we will do the same’” (MR4, INTERVIEW, 2025). This plea highlights the fatigue of constant resistance, and the women are grateful for the welcome but reject the implicit demand that they trade their faith for belonging.

### **5.3. Brazilian Self-critique: The Mirror Of “Vulgarity.”**

An unexpected finding in the interviews was the way Brazilian participants used the image of the Muslim woman to critique their own culture. B6, for instance, states bluntly that “Arab women are not vulgar,” explicitly contrasting them with “Brazilian women who are characterized by provocative clothing and poor language manners”(B6, INTERVIEW, 2025). The lawyer, B7, critiques Brazilian society for being “too lazy” and not reading enough; all they care about is football, samba, and drugs, implying that the discipline observed in the refugee community highlights a deficit in the national character (B7, INTERVIEW, 2025). B5 implies that “ Brazilians,

uhh, they live in a bubble, unaware that the world is larger than their own understanding.” (B5, INTERVIEW, 2025).

#### **5.4. Daily Life Negotiations: “Jeitinho” And Cultural Hybridity**

Beyond the symbolic conflict of the veil, cultural shock is managed through the pragmatics of daily life. The results indicate that Muslim women in Goiânia are not isolating themselves but rather engaging in a complex process of cultural hybridity. Most Muslim women are learning the language and also earning an income to support their kids by selling their country’s traditional cuisines and handicrafts in local markets. “ We have to get out of our comfort zones and get to work, so we find our ways here to live in peace.”(MR4, INTERVIEW, 2025).

##### **5.4.1. The Challenge Of Halal**

One of the most immediate practical shocks is the food part. In Islamic beliefs, consuming Halal food is non-negotiable, and the city of Goiânia offers minimal options. An Afghan mother, MR3, explains the everyday exhaustion of this hunt as “finding the Halal meat in the city is tough” (MR3, INTERVIEW, 2025). MR6 shares her concerns, saying, “Halal meat cannot be found, especially here in Goiania,” forcing her to rely on veggies or frozen chicken. She recalls saying “Bismillah” (In the name of God) over the chicken herself to purify it for her children (MR6, INTERVIEW, 2025). This offers an insight into how the shock enters the home environment, transforming the ordinary act of grocery shopping into a spiritual crisis in which the women must improvise to live.

## **6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This research began with a question about how Muslim refugee women navigate cultural shock in Brazil. However, as the voices of participants B1–B7 and MR1–MR6 have shown, the shock is not a one-way street. It is a collision of worlds where the body serves as the primary point of impact.

The most significant finding of this study is the stark contrast between how Brazilian society imagines the Muslim woman and how she experiences herself. While Brazilian participants frequently interpreted the hijab as a symbol of “submission” or “suffering,” the Muslim women themselves described it as a tool of power, “safety,” and “piety.”

Returning to the central theme of being “emotionally naked,” our findings suggest that the arrival of visibly practicing Muslim women in Goiânia does more than add to the city's diversity; it holds up a mirror to Brazilian society itself. When a Brazilian stares at a Muslim woman wearing the hijab with feelings of pity, curiosity, or shock, in fact, they are often reacting to their own cultural anxieties about the body, sexuality, and freedom.

## 6.1. Schematic Summary Of Results

To visualize the “double shock” identified in the analysis, the diverging perspectives can be summarized as follows:

<b>Dimension of Shock</b>	<b>Brazilian Perspective (External Gaze)</b>	<b>Muslim Woman's Experience (Internal Reality)</b>
<b>The Body &amp; Hijab</b>	Seen as a symbol of oppression, submission, and “hiding pain.”	Felt as a “second skin,” a sanctuary of safety, and a marker of religious agency.

<b>Public Space</b>	Viewed as “normal” and “free”; the covered woman is the anomaly.	Experienced as “invasive,” “libertine,” and morally shocking due to public nudity/intimacy.
<b>Social Interaction</b>	Characterized by “benevolent pity” and a desire to “save” or convert.	Characterized by the fatigue of constant explanation and the need for “cultural hybridity.”

## 6.2. Beyond Tolerance: Recommendations

Ultimately, this article argues that tolerance is insufficient. Tolerance allows the Brazilian to look at the Muslim woman and say, “I accept you, even though I pity you.” Proper understanding requires religious literacy, the ability to recognize that a woman can be entirely free, thoroughly modern, and fully covered at the same time.

To bridge this existing gap, we suggest that public policies and educational initiatives in Brazil, especially in the city of Goiânia, should move beyond mere services for welcoming refugees and immigrants to more active measures, such as providing proper education on Brazil's cultural differences and those of Muslim refugees. Schools and community centers might benefit from “body sensitivity” programs that de-stigmatize modesty and present it as a viable personal choice rather than a societal imposition.

## 6.3. Gaps And Future Research

While this study offers deep insight into the specific context of Goiânia, it has limitations. First, the male perspective remains a significant gap; the experience of Muslim refugee men, who do not wear a hijab but still carry the weight of the “terrorist” stereotype, requires further investigation. Second, long-term integration studies

are needed to determine whether the “shock” fades into assimilation over decades or hardens into isolation.

Finally, the “silent prejudice, the whispers of terrorists” that the participant MR5 heard but that other interviewees might hide or downplay, remains challenging to capture fully in face-to-face interviews. Future research could employ ethnographic observation to capture these subtler, yet equally painful, interactions.

#### **6.4. Concluding Thought**

To conclude the article, we must return to the paradox of being emotionally naked. The Muslim refugee/immigrant women may be covered in fabric. Yet, she walks through the streets of Goiânia emotionally exposed, trying to build a sanctuary of safety in a land that finds her religious practices unsettling. Conversely, the Brazilian society, comfortable with physical exposure, often remains emotionally guarded by stereotypes, unable to see the woman beneath the veil without the lens of pity.

This research suggests that proper integration will not come from asking Muslim women to unveil themselves to fit in. Instead, it requires the host society to unveil its own eyes. We are all, in our own ways, navigating the discomfort of difference. If we can move beyond the shock of the physical body, beyond the friction of the covered versus the naked, we might discover that beneath the layers of cotton, culture, and prejudice, our fundamental search for dignity, safety, and belonging is remarkably the same.

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