

**Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion: New Perspectives  
from Europe and North America**

*Emma Tarlo and Annelies Moors, eds.  
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This volume of scholarship surrounding Islamic fashion presents a counter-narrative to a dominant story: that Muslim women in the West are subjugated by the oppressive and patriarchal yoke of Islam. *Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America* offers a fresh new look at veiling, its intersection with religious piety, family, community, religious authority, fashion, and commoditization through sixteen distinct stud-

ies ranging from clothing items like the *burqini* and the *pardosu* to larger issues surrounding identity and politics, such as North American Islamophobia and its impact on Canadian Muslims. This book represents a large field of research on Muslim women's lived experiences, one that reveals the complexities inherent in these religious actors whose choices of dress reveal a large set of competing values, desires, and commitments.

The book is organized into five sections: location and encounter, history and heritage, the marketplace, fashion and media, and fashion and anti-fashion. Two of its attractive features are the numerous black and white images running through many of the chapters, as well as the two groups of stunning, provocative color photographs showing the richness of Islamic fashion, from "hijabi street style" to London Muslim hipster style.

The first section features pieces on Muslim swimwear, Canadian Muslim identity, South Asian textiles in London high fashion, and Poland's Tatar Muslim community. Like many of the pieces, the contribution on South Asian textiles raises important questions about the body vis-à-vis clothing that, as Emma Tarlo points out, may be perceived "not as a second skin but as the skin itself—an indelible marker and visible proof of permanent difference, provoking not only curiosity but also ridicule, racism and suspicion" (p. 77). What Muslim women choose or choose not to wear, from garments to styles of veiling and color choices, determine how others see them. In the case of South Asian textiles, for example, the women who wear them may be seen as being too showy, glamorous, or sexual, even though these fabrics are located within an Islamic cultural milieu. Tarlo raises a central theme of the book: Muslim women are constantly judged, as are their non-Muslim counterparts, on a variety of dress choices that are approved or criticized by those communities and individuals who seek to regulate their bodies.

The second section examines the impact of Turkish fashion on individuals and communities living in Turkey, the Netherlands, and Houston. The scholars focus on how secularism and religiosity intersect in fashion, dress, and clothing choices. Sule Yuksel Senler pays special attention to the importance of bodies in Turkish political life. Of particular interest here is the intention behind certain modes of dress that are seen as impacting, or shaping, the health of the Turkish citizen. As she points out: "The shape of the body is particularly important in the Turkish context, since the Turkish modernization process aimed to create not only secular but also straight and fit bodies" (p. 115). Such an enactment of authoritative power reflects a concern over the management of bodies by those systems that exhibit power. The Turkish state is envisioned as determinative, thereby echoing Michel Foucault's concern about the government's effect of on the human body.

The third section emphasizes the marketplace, the intersection between Islamic notions of modesty and the European fashion industry. Its three chapters focus on the transnational channels between Turkey and Western European states, Islamic clothing production in France, and the negotiation of identity among Muslim salespeople in Britain. Reina Lewis's piece on *muhājibāt* (women who wear hijab) asks, "What is the impact of sartorially Muslim women behind as well as in front on the shop counter?" (p. 10). The issue of branding comes into play here, in terms of whether they represent or challenge a particular corporate culture. In Britain, Muslims are often quite fashionable and thereby elicit a new kind of branding for the companies for which they work. As Lewis puts it, "Looking 'different' in this instance did not mean looking Muslim; it meant looking trendily Muslim" (p. 187). Here she refers to the "Muslimah Fashionista," the Muslim who expresses religion and fashion together. In Britain, due in part to the large numbers of Muslims who are part of the community, trendy dressing is one way to make Islam palatable to the non-Muslim, to show the intersection of East and West through the Muslim salesperson, what Lewis describes as "in-store style mediators" (p. 194).

The fourth section looks at some of the ways that fashion and media intersect by interviewing the blogger, designer, and model Zinah Nur Sharif and two articles – one that examines fashion photographs featuring hijab that evoke sensual themes and another that explores an Islamic beauty pageant. Among the many provocative themes developed in this section is how even more modest expressions of fashion fail to avoid the commodification, display, and exploitation of female bodies. Degla Selim describes this as part of the colonial process, where "the Orientalist gaze has been exported back to the former colonies, creating visualities of self-exotification" (p. 215).

In the photographs of Jimmy Bakius, the images are overtly sexual, containing "sexually charged iconic signals such as half-open lips glittering with lip gloss, the 'come on' look that challenges the presumably excited heterosexual male and the angel-like, subdued, non-threatening pose of a female ready to be conquered" (p. 217). In Selim's piece and Christiansen's chapter on "Miss Headscarf," it is evident that women cannot escape the male gaze, even when wearing religiously mediated clothing. As Mehmet Nedef argues, the "covering styles" in Islamic dress do not prevent them from being judged as sexual objects, which is a natural consequence of the modern consumerist globalist world (p. 227).

The book's final section examines fashion and anti-fashion through the tension that exists between religious ideals and expectations and the demands that society places on women to display their bodies in particular ways. In her chapter on how Dutch Muslim women negotiate religious beliefs and fashion,

Annalies Moors points out that Islamic traditional dress has entered high fashion. *Abayas*, for example, have become part of haute couture. As she argues:

Not only have Emirati women been trained at fashion schools in London and New York, but French and Italian houses such as Dior, Nina Ricci and Alberta Ferretti have designed abayas as well, which were then sold at Saks Fifth Avenue stores in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the region, while fashion abayas are also sold at Harrods in London. (p. 248)

On the other side of the spectrum, some women have chosen to wear dress that is “sober and distinctively non-fashionable,” in a move that challenges the commodification of the body (p. 255). This suggests that not only do Muslim women have a variety of ways of performing religion through clothing, but also that these performances are often embedded within political perspectives.

This volume provides a large breadth of research on Islamic fashion, the body, and Islamic feminism. It is a good choice for courses that deal with these topics, as well as with other topics in women’s studies, media and religion, and Islamic studies. I used it in my recent “Islam, Gender, and Sexuality” class, where it was very successful partly because of its exploration of Islamic fashion in Europe and the intersection between East and West. Using interviews, research into past and present issues affecting the body, and given attention to fashion trends in Europe and Muslim-majority countries, this book provides insights into some of the ways that Muslim women perceive themselves and are perceived by others, both in the homeland and abroad.

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