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## Book Review of *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures*, by Reina Lewis

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## BOOK REVIEW

### *Muslim fashion: contemporary style cultures*, by Reina Lewis

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This is a needed manuscript that discusses and traces the rise and popularization of transnational Muslim women's fashion from the 1980s to the present. It especially focuses on the beginning of the twenty-first century that witnessed the emergence of a subculture that normalizes Muslim women's ways of dress, specifically the veil, as part of contemporary mainstream fashion. This fact refutes the stereotypical Orientalists' binary assumptions of West versus East that places Muslim women's fashion as anti-Western and pre-modern. Lewis argues that Muslim fashion is a complex concept that intertwines multiple fashion systems within different levels of modernity; moreover, fashion's meanings change depending on generation, class and temporal and spatial contexts. The book provides a vivid illustration of the ever-changing cultural landscape (virtual and physical – i.e. Internet, social media, Istanbul and London streets) where “shopping, fashion, and veils” are pitched together (3). The growth

of this youth fashion subculture is an expression of identity negotiation in which a young generation of Muslims acquire more than one type of cultural capital (using Pierre Bourdieu's theory) that enables their communication and "engagement with mainstream fashion" and with "coreligionists and to majority of non-Muslim observers alike" (3).

Historically, Muslim fashion systems have been influenced by the evolving relationship between religion, gender and society. Lewis affirms this relationship. She uses an interdisciplinary approach to explain and analyse the political, economic and cultural contexts embedded in the emergence of contemporary Muslim youth fashion culture. Geographically, she covers West Europe, North America (WENA) and Turkey as major production centres and consumer markets. She uses a large range of archival and non-archival sources including print and online fashion magazines and catalogues, along with oral interviews with consumers, floor shop sellers, managers, bloggers and others.

Lewis' book consists of seven chapters organized chronologically and thematically that support her major argument of the emergence of an ongoing Muslim youth subculture in WENA since early 2000s. She implements various postcolonial theories in her analysis and discussion of Muslim identity politics in relation to faith, culture, ethnicity and gender. Chapter One provides background information on the history and demographics of Muslim populations in WENA. Further, it explains Turkey's government policies that used women's and men's bodies to illustrate the country's secularism through the banning of the Fez (1925) and the veil (1928). The chapter connects the emergence of Muslim fashion with the revival of a transnational Muslim community, the *umma*. Chapter Two is a good illustration of Lewis' key point that specific fashion choices are a result of what society chooses to sell. She explains how veil wearing in Turkey had been connected to an older and more rural generation of women until the 1980s when the veil's meaning changed with the emergence of the Turkish Muslim fashion industry that incorporated it in a "Western aesthetic" (71). The chapter showcases how Turkey emerged as a market leader in Muslim fashion. Lewis explains the development and the commercialization of Turkish fashion globally through her discussion of three major firms: Tekbir Giyim, Armine and Aker. Chapter Three outlines the development and the content of Muslim fashion media and argues that Muslim lifestyle cultures are products of the engagement with various media including in-print and online magazines, in which bloggers, photographers, editors, stylists and models provide substance that aims to meet conflicting readers' and commentators' demands from both mainstream and minority fashion industries. The portrayal of women's bodies illustrates the ability of Muslim lifestyle magazines to utilize secular media to provide new "preferred modes of femininity nuanced by concerns about modesty, type of covering, and the spiritual dilemmas of picturing the human body" (113). The chapter provides visual examples from these magazines, such as *Emel* and *Sisters in Britain* and *Azizah* and *Muslim Girl* in the United States.

Throughout the book, Lewis makes a key point that religious identity is achieved not ascribed. Likewise, *hijabi*, or women's "modest" fashion, is a choice that reflects a combination of "mainstream high street and specialist diaspora and international retail offering" (164). Nevertheless, Muslim women's fashion enforces the connection between mainstream and ethnic fashion, key points of Chapter Four. In addition to choosing how to dress, Muslim women are more deeply engaged in the fashion industry as shop floor sellers giving their faith visibility in high streets and malls. These engagements, as Chapter Five argues, brought with them a "series of legal measures that for the first time provided protection from religious discrimination to all faiths, including Islam and Muslims"

(200). Chapter Six continues Chapter Four's discussion of the contribution of Muslim lifestyle media and explains the ways in which *hijabi* bloggers and designers utilize digital media "to create a new form of modest fashion" and a new understanding about the contemporary renewal of the *umma* (25).

According to Lewis, the marketing and commercialization of Muslim women's dress is constantly influenced by an exposure to increasingly global mediums, including digital communications and magazines. Also, as Chapter Seven explores, there is a connection between Muslim fashion marketing and "Islamic branding, interfaith dialogue, and new Muslim taste communities including non-hijabi modest fashion" (287) that will keep the Muslim fashion industry an ongoing process that is constantly in renovation through the usage and reinterpretation of what would constitute modesty in Islam.

The book is a significant contribution to ethnic, gender, cultural, Middle East and migration studies. It will greatly benefit graduate and undergraduate college students in these fields. It is also an attractive topic to general readers who want to learn about Muslim fashion away from the dominant polarized politics about Islam and Muslims in the West.