

Lewis, Reina. *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. 400 pp.*

Reviewed by Lori Hall-Araujo

A feminist fashion curator colleague recently confided to me their discomfort seeing veiled women in the Western world and wondered why some fashion scholars applaud increased visibility of, for example, the Burkini,[™] the full-body concealing swimsuit. How, wondered my colleague, could we in democratic societies ever accept the hijab when it was so clearly a form of gendered oppression?

My colleague's question implies there are only two positions to take on the matter, a common attitude in the Western world that extends well beyond fashion scholars and curators. Reina Lewis, Professor of Cultural Studies at the London College of Fashion, challenges this perspective in her insightful and rigorously researched book, *Muslim Fashion: Contemporary Style Cultures*.

Lewis' research methodology and theoretical positioning set a welcome high standard for those who study dress. Significantly, the author positions herself as one who recognizes that fashion is not strictly the domain of the capitalist Western world, and posits there are multiple fashion systems and style cultures. Among dress and fashion scholars there has been a history of distinguishing between essentialized, unchanging "traditional" dress, which anthropologists study, and Western fashion operating within capitalism. Lewis rejects this dichotomy in her study of what she calls a "history of the present, written while it was happening" (15). Her research methods include media ethnography, in-person interviews, attending "modest dress" fashion shows, and shopper observation. Lewis, who describes herself as a white "nonreligiously observant" Jew, says not being Muslim gave her a research advantage insofar as she did not get too deeply enmeshed in the nuances that a coreligionist scholar might.

The book, which will likely be of interest to those in a range of disciplines, is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1, "From Multiculture to Multifaith," considers the emergence of new discourses about Islam post-9/11 and post-7/7. The author places these discussions within a historical context of Muslim women's dress and responses to their covered bodies. Chapter 2, "The Commercialization of Islamic Dress," considers the exchange between mainstream fashion and modest Muslim dress, with Turkey's fashion market serving as a case study. Chapter 3, "Muslim Lifestyle Magazines," looks at fashion media that emerged in the mid-2000s and which marked a new phase of Islamic consumer cultures. This chapter is particularly well illustrated—albeit in black and white—and powerfully reinforces the author's position that multiple fashion systems coexist and cross-pollinate. Seventeen color plates inserted between chapters 3 and 4 are especially useful in providing examples of diverse expressions of Muslim fashion. These illustrations include social media posts as well as fashion photography representing a spectrum of styles and tastes.

* This editorially reviewed contribution was accepted for publication in *Museum Anthropology Review* on February 25, 2017. The work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Chapter 4, “Taste and Distinction,” challenges the mainstream versus Muslim fashion binary that my colleague suggested. Chapters 5 and 6 explore shopping practices among women who veil as well the ways technologies such as blogging and social media have affected Muslim fashion. Chapter 7 concludes the book by looking at corporate Islamic “branding” initiatives within the Muslim diaspora.

According to statistics from the FBI, anti-Muslim hate crimes in the United States saw a sharp uptick after 2001. Muslim women who veil have been particularly vulnerable. You do not have to be a fashion scholar to know that every single dressed person—including nudists—subjects themselves to others’ assessments. Hair, clothing, bodily adornments, and context all come into play when we interact with other people. Sometimes a person’s religion is expressed through dress, a useful means for helping someone identify community members with whom they share beliefs. Yet the context for visible religious dress signifiers can also be dangerous. Reina Lewis’ *Muslim Fashion* is a timely and welcome addition to a growing canon of rigorous scholarship, which treats dress as a context-specific practice where multiple fashion and other cultural systems intersect.

Lori Hall-Araujo is a curator for the Costume Museum and Research Library at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, where she is also an assistant professor in the Fashion Program.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14434/mar.v11i1.23541>