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Review of *British Muslim Women in Creative and Cultural Industries* - by Saskia Warren. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2022. 353 pp. £24.99 paperback.

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Anamik Saha

In his analysis of the Orientalist narratives that frame Western news coverage of the Middle East, Edward Said (1981) considers why it is always *the West* that is pitted against Islam, rather than Christianity. He concludes that it is because the West, as a formation of modernity, is understood as having superseded its principal religion, Christianity. Thus, secularism is an intrinsic part of the West's sense of modern identity. On the other hand, Arab nations are still defined by Islam, rooted in 'tradition' and, it is implied, primitiveness and backwardness. As Saskia Warren shows in her important new book, this Orientalist discourse persists in shaping the experiences of British Muslim women in creative and cultural industries.

Against the backdrop of the rise of the global Islamic cultural economy, based upon modest fashion (both high street and luxury) and the consumer culture that has developed around Ramadan, Warren focuses on the experiences of British Muslim women cultural producers working in digital media, fashion, and the visual arts. This book adds to the substantial body of research on the precarious and insecure nature of creative labour, and how its promise of good work lures people in but leads to exploitation and alienation – especially pronounced for women, working-class, and racially minoritized subjects. From a cultural geography perspective, the book offers a particularly strong account of regionalism and how the predominantly Manchester-based subjects of her research are disadvantaged by the London-centric nature of the creative and cultural industries.

What makes this such an urgent and original contribution to the work on inequalities in creative and cultural industries is Warren's critical account of secularism and how this presents very particular obstacles for Muslims. Across her research sites, Warren shows us how it is through a secular framework that racist and sexist expectations are placed upon

Muslim women, in terms of the kinds of art and culture they are ‘supposed’ to produce and the roles they are allowed to occupy. She shows how practicing Muslims – especially those who wear the veil – are perceived as fundamentally at odds with the social life of British creative work (compounded further by the patriarchalism of their own communities).

Warren’s book has forced me to re-evaluate my own work on the experiences of (British Asian) Muslims in the cultural industries, which too easily subsumed Islamophobia into an overarching frame of racialisation. Warren shows how secularism is a force in itself, every bit as powerful as classism, racism and sexism, and how religion throws up very particular dynamics of inequality.

Reading this book, it is difficult not to feel pessimistic about the fate of British Muslim creative workers. The inequalities that they experience will persist as long as the West paints Islam as irreconcilably different and anti-modern. But Warren reminds us of the value, importance and potential of culture-making in disrupting the West-Islam binary. Warren highlights how the cultural, political, as well as aesthetic interventions of British Muslim women creative workers can expose the exclusionary and hierarchical nature of creative and cultural industries. Increasing awareness around these issues - and especially the oppression of religious identities - is only a start, but exactly how positive change is to be enacted.

Anamik Saha is a Professor of Race and Media in the University of Leeds.

References

Said, Edward. 1981. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. New York: Pantheon Books.