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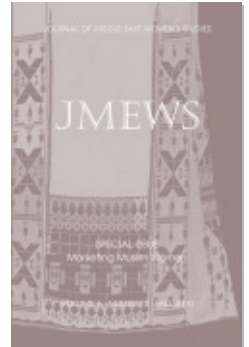
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## **Muslim Women, Consumer Capitalism, and the Islamic Culture Industry**

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# INTRODUCTION

## MUSLIM WOMEN, CONSUMER CAPITALISM, AND THE ISLAMIC CULTURE INDUSTRY

**BANU GÖKARIKSEL AND ELLEN McLARNEY**



This special issue of *JMEWS* examines the intersection of consumer capitalism, women, and the Islamic culture industry. While capitalist forms of economic development have long been part of Muslim societies in various (and often contested) forms (Gran 1979), in the last decade there has been a marked change in both the substance and the scale of the relationship between Islam and capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Islamic movements and neoliberal consumer capitalism have arisen simultaneously in many settings, leading to newly articulated and contextually different manifestations of “Islamic capitalism” (Buğra 1998; Hefner 1998; Öniş 2000; Tuğal 2002; 2009; Kuran 2004; Adas 2006). A new market for commodities, media, advertising, businesses, and consumer segments identified as “Islamic” has helped in the creation of a new culture industry.<sup>2</sup> While by no means uniform, this Islamic culture industry is increasingly central to the production, packaging, and dissemination of religious products: from traditional print media, cassette sermons, and online fatwas (Bunt 2009; Hirschkind 2009) to the fashionable hijab (Kılıçbay and Binark 2002; Balasescu 2003; 2007; Akou 2007; Lewis 2007; Moors 2007; Sandıkcı and Ger 2007; Schulz 2007; Tarlo 2007; Gökarıksel and Secor 2009).

Islamic knowledge, performances, and selves are more and more mediated through increasingly commodified cultural forms and spaces. From memoirs, novels, lifestyle magazines, and newspapers to television channels; from religious education centers and *halal* markets and restaurants (where food is prepared according to Islamic rules) to holiday resorts and posh gated communities, Muslim identities are constructed

through commodities and consumption practices (Abu-Lughod 1995; 2005; Öncü 1995; Saktanber 1997; 2002; Bilici 1999; Göle 1999; 2002; Fealy and White 2008; Fischer 2008; Pink 2009). Muslims identify as such and connect with one another through Islamic products and spaces, forming new, transnational and transregional “Muslim networks” (Cooke and Lawrence 2005). At the same time, networks forged through capitalist consumption practices create new marginalizations, leaving some unconnected.

In the newly emergent “Islamic” culture industry, a series of images, practices, knowledges, and commodities are marketed specifically to “Muslim women.” Muslim women have been active participants in this industry as both consumers and producers (writers, editors, models, designers, business owners, etc.). New magazines, television programs, sports clubs, hairdressers, and clothing stores *for* and often *by* Muslim women have flourished in the last decades. Many have become entrepreneurs, establishing businesses that combine economic and religious motives. They have engaged in the creation, labeling, and advertising of the objects, narratives, representations, and performances of Muslim womanhood that combine Islamic teachings and practices with new (and old) conceptions of piety, beauty, fashion, lifestyle, motherhood, professionalism, and citizenship. Muslim women have been identified as a niche market with particular needs and desires, mostly attributed to an essentialized Muslimness. The papers in this special issue examine the images, practices, and ideals of Muslim femininity produced, circulated, and consumed in the global marketplace.

These papers collectively show that contemporary Muslim femininities are increasingly mediated through the market forces of consumer capitalism, impacting Muslim women’s identities, lifestyles, and belonging in complex ways. What it means to be a Muslim woman is constantly negotiated, defined, and redefined through or in reaction to the images, narratives, and knowledges about Muslim womanhood constructed in the marketplace. As Muslim women stake out their own positions, they actively engage with given Islamic practice and knowledge as well as with modalities of capitalism. They often navigate between certain Orientalist stereotypes that marketed images sometimes challenge and sometimes reify. The continuing centrality of the veil epitomizes the simultaneous challenge to and reification of stereotypes, as it becomes

a marker of agency, self-expression, and empowerment. At the same time, representations of self-determined, independent, and professional Muslim women conform to images of the ideal consumer. While the veiled images reinscribe Islamic norms and identifications by emphasizing particular ways of being Muslim for women, they also transform the very content and contours of Islamic piety and femininity. The essays in this issue also reveal how Muslim women's bodies circulate in the market, turning into commodities themselves. Muslim women are not only targeted as a consumer niche, but their bodies constitute a territory on which capitalism stakes its claims (once again). Yet Muslim women also mediate these market forces in their expression of piety, formulation of communities, and construction of identities.

This issue examines the centrality of gender in new forms of Islamic consumer culture, building on a body of recent work that explores the relationship between capitalism and religion. This research generally looks at the rise of "commodity communities" in the Middle East (Reynolds 2003) and consumerism in Muslim societies (Pink 2009). Some recent studies have focused on the critical role of gender in the Islamic culture industry, such as the role of veiled women in film and television (*al-fannanat al-islamiyya*) (Abu-Lughod 1995; Malti-Douglas 2001); the current boom in Muslim women's memoirs and autobiographies (Dabashi 2006; Whitlock 2006; Booth this issue); the marketing of the veil and other religious commodities (Jones 2007; Gökariksel and Secor 2009); and the appearance of shopping centers and department stores catering to Muslim women (Wynn 1997; Abaza 2001; Reynolds 2003). We pose questions about why these gendered identities are critical both to expressions of Islamic piety and to the operation of consumer cultures, questions that cannot be entirely resolved here. The articles in this issue proffer explanations through close readings of images and representations, analyses of contextual factors and sociopolitical trends, and attention to the operations of transnational capital.

Drawing from feminist theory, we recognize the importance of women not only to consumption, purchasing, and shopping, but also to the marketing and circulation of commodities (Goffman 1979; Wilson 1992a; 2003; Roberts 1998). The depiction and creation of women as consumers, juxtaposed to men as breadwinners, have been central elements of Western modernity (Benson 1986; Wilson 1992b; Lancaster 1995).

Given the intimate relationship between the performance of particular gender roles and the growth of consumer capitalism, feminist theory has long been concerned with the simultaneously empowering and subjugating effects of consumer capitalism on women (Wilson 1992b; de Grazia and Furlough 1996, 7). Some theorists characterize postfeminism as a “reconciliation with, and celebration of, consumer culture,” a stark shift from an earlier phase of anti-consumerist feminist activism (Catterall, Maclaran, and Stevens 2006, 223). The “postfeminist imaginary” celebrates the empowerment of product choice, self-fashioning through commodities, representation in the market of images and ideas, realization of consumer desires, and participation in the structures of economic power. We are critical of this celebratory stance as it is important to analyze the imperial, military, racist, sexist, and economic ends to which the capitalist imaginary has been put. At the same time, we recognize the modes of subjectivity consumer capitalism facilitates, mainly through the power of a bourgeois imaginary. The papers in this issue help in understanding the effects of marketing and consumption practices on how gender and piety are enacted, embodied, and represented.

### ISLAM AND CONSUMER CAPITALISM

There is a seeming tension between professed Islamic virtues and the logic of consumer capitalism. While the former is often defined as modesty, thrift, other-worldly devotion, spiritualism, and communitarianism, the latter is perceived to cultivate self-indulgence, conspicuous consumption, this-worldly orientation, materialism, and individualism. Islamic puritanists see capitalism as inherently incompatible with Islam and instead advocate “Islamic economics” (e.g. Maududi 1975) as an alternative system with its own set of rules, values, and practices, or as a “third way” between capitalism and socialism (Pfeifer 2001; Uddin 2003). Aversion to consumerism has generally been strong among Islamic thinkers and politicians, even among those who seek to combine Islamic ethics and capitalism.<sup>3</sup> For example, those Islamists who take a “moral capitalist” stand (Tuğal 2002, 93) emphasize religious ethics and solidarity in the everyday life of Muslim subjects, advocate moderation in consumption, and urge the avoidance of extravagance and waste (Kuran 2004). In this issue, Reina Lewis and Carla Jones show that producers of Mus-

lim women's magazines face the problem of formulating and putting into practice an Islam-oriented ethics while remaining profitable and competitive in a capitalist economy. In Gökarişel and Secor's analysis, women consumers of *tesettür*-fashion engage in daily mediations in an attempt to reconcile Islamic ideals with their multiple other sociospatial and cultural concerns and desires. Their everyday decisions about what to wear thereby involve navigating a complicated ethical terrain.

Even as Islamic movements present themselves in opposition to commodity cultures that spread Western lifestyles and values (or to Western lifestyles and values that spread commodity cultures), commodification is "a context and activity historically shared by Islamists and secularists alike, rather than being a domain that divided them" (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 225). For those who identify themselves as Islamists—wearing certain kinds of clothes, eating particular foods, shopping in special stores, starting Islamic businesses—consumption becomes a crucial means to fashion an identity. More broadly, Muslim identities, like secular ones, are expressed through commodities (Abaza 2001; Sandıkcı and Ger 2001; Salamandra 2004; Gökarişel 2007). While some conceptualize Islam and consumer capitalism as antithetical or as involving a one-way relationship in which capitalism transforms Islam, we approach their relationship as one that is more complex and multi-directional.<sup>4</sup> The articles in this issue examine how the different actors in the Islamic culture industry and consumer market mediate between these conflicting values of Islamic capitalism.

## COMMODYING MUSLIM FEMININITIES

Mediating the market involves the constant management of difference and diversity among Muslims. Marketization processes tend to produce universal essentialist tendencies to create a "Muslimwoman" in the singular who stands for global Muslim society (cooke 2007). Minoo Moallem (2005) has identified homogenizing effects in "the fabrication of a transnational Muslim femininity" that has been "instrumental in the commodification of Islamic identity politics in the late capitalist global market" (125). Marilyn Booth's examination (this issue) of the recent explosion of Muslim women's memoirs reveals the literary and political problems of the genre (see also Dabashi 2006; Whitlock 2006). Despite

the homogeneous and homogenizing production of *the* Muslim woman in the Islamic culture industry, there is a multitude of Muslim women's identities that are differentiated in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, piety, sexuality, and politics. This diversity has recently been picked up by some actors in an attempt to provide a political corrective to the homogenizing effects of the marketplace. But as Booth and Lewis demonstrate in this issue, these representations rarely manage to avoid the market logic that turns difference into a marketable product, a logic of profitability that influences the value and legibility of Muslim products and practices (see also McLarney 2009a; 2009b). Certain kinds of representation and visibility are privileged, while others are rendered undesirable. Muslim identities unpalatable to the sensibilities of the market are excluded, often leading to further marginalizations at the intersection of class, race, and ethnicity (White 1999; Yavuz 2003). Nevertheless, some previously marginal or invisible progressive, feminist, and gay Muslim identities have gained public prominence, complicating the singular representations of Muslims and Islam (Göle 1999; 2002; Abu-Lughod 2001; Moghadam 2002; Safi 2003).

The articles in this issue illustrate the complexity of the relationship between Islam, gender, and capitalism. As Muslim women seek self-representation through their own magazines, writings, and publishing, they attempt to counter Orientalist representations by producing their own images. However, this endeavor inevitably entails producing a marketable image that is attractive and desirable, that of the "good" or ideal Muslim woman fashioned by the sensibilities of Islamic ethics and consumer capitalism (Mamdani 2004). On the cover of *Muslim Girl*, this may be an American Muslim girl with the US flag painted on her face, seamlessly integrating American patriotism with Muslim faith (Kassam 2008). In the pages of *Azizah*, it may be multicultural images (like the United Colors of Benetton) of colorful, friendly faces with headscarves tied in different styles. These images and others like them may produce internal Orientalizations or be self-Orientalizing (Jones and Leshkovich 2003), as in the case of the new publishing craze for Muslim women's writings. Authors are shown in hijab, veils are featured on the cover, and liberation narratives become the dominant narrative. As Booth points out in this issue, the translation process may be manipulated to produce an Orientalized version of Arabo-Islamic society, the "familiar stranger"

that combines both difference and readability for market audiences (Kassam 2008). Mona Russell emphasizes the fact that these differences are coded not just for class but for race, as ethnic markers are identified as marketable, hence assimilable, hence “white” (Ghannam 2008).

The iconography of the veil epitomizes the dialectic of Orientalism, with its colonial and postcolonial histories. In the market, veiling becomes a kind of brand or label of a consolidated Muslim femininity. “What if,” Minoo Moallem (2005, 114) has suggested, “the veil, which is portrayed as a site of activity and agency, is nothing but an empty signifier, a means to insert the body into the world of consumer capitalism?” Veiling transforms the iconic symbol of Muslim women and Islam into a commodity moving through the ever changing cycles of the global fashion industry. As Gökarıksel and Secor (2009) have shown, women’s veiling, on one hand, could be read as a sign of Islamicization, as the proponents of the veiling-fashion industry claim. On the other hand, the marketing of the veil as a fashion item blurs its meaning at the very moment that it is supposed to stand for *the* Muslim woman. Wearing a certain style of veil may simultaneously be a disciplinary practice crucial to the cultivation of piety (Mahmood 2005; Gökarıksel 2009) and a gendered performance of social distinction in terms of class, taste, and urbanity (White 1999; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Gökarıksel and Secor 2009) or of ethnicity and race (Dwyer 1999).

## THE MEDIA AND MUSLIM CONSUMER COMMUNITIES

The explosion in the production and trade of religious goods, objects circulated as markers of belief, aids in the execution of ritual practices and duties and the expression of religious identity. The articles in this issue are concerned with how the Islamic culture industry and the commodities, images, and meanings that circulate within it shape the expression and constitution of femininity and piety. The Islamic culture industry uses—and creates—networks to circulate signifiers of Islamic identity while also reconfiguring Islamic practice according to the exigencies of the capitalist market and its power structures. This entails the fashioning of Islamic subjectivities, where certain commodities, such as the fashionable veil, have multiple performative effects on the body.

We are especially interested in the ways that “consumer culture



provides the modalities through which national and international belongings could be imagined, and resistant identities recognized” (Grewal 2005, 17). Even as the marketing of Muslim identity is understood as alternative to the dominant media discourses around women’s bodies, “resistant identities” gain recognition through their visibility in the market and legitimacy through their purchase on popular imagination. Inderpal Grewal talks about neoliberalism’s marketing of social movements, but here we see a kind of marketing of religious movements as well, as Islamic piety circulates in the public sphere, in the written and spoken word, in television, print media, video and audio cassettes, and on the internet. The articles published here analyze consumer culture’s representations of Muslim women’s bodies and practices in a wide range of media: books, magazines, websites, newspapers, catalogs, and advertising. Some pieces have a regional or national focus (Egypt, Europe, Indonesia, Kuwait, North America, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia), but these different locales cannot be separated from the larger transregional market forces in which they are embedded. These articles examine consumer identities existing simultaneously in national and transnational space.

This special issue focuses on the role of commodities and media in creating these new parameters of identification. In this examination, we join a new body of work attuned to how religious movements use media, consumer cultures, and new technologies (Moallem 2005; Bunt 2009). Recent scholarship interprets media as “religious entities, taking on religion’s power to shape and order society and the individual” (Hirschkind and Larkin 2008, 3). The media become one of the “circulatory forms through which religious publics constitute themselves and their members, often in relation to, or in opposition to, competing forms of identity” (5). The Islamic culture industry and its consumer markets might be considered as taking on a similar role. The circulation not only of media, but of products, goods, and commodities, brings together religious publics to which the “aura” of Islam is supposed to impart authenticity and legitimacy. But whether they convey the spiritual meanings they profess is a question we pose in this issue.

#### STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The papers in this issue are developed from a conference on “Marketing Muslim Women” sponsored by *JMEWS* at Duke University and the

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The conference brought together an interdisciplinary group of scholars as well as artists and activists, most prominently the Egyptian novelist and feminist Nawal El Saadawi, and Tayyibah Taylor, founding editor of *Azizah*, North America's first Muslim women's magazine. The conference broadly explored the salience of a newly emergent transnational Islamic culture industry centering on Muslim women. The articles here focus on the production, circulation, and consumption of images, products, and narratives about Muslim femininities, primarily in the era of neoliberal globalization and the post-9/11 geopolitical context. Mona Russell's analysis of the representation of women's bodies in advertising in early twentieth-century Egypt opens the issue with a critical historical perspective. Russell explores how gendered—and racialized—images were used to market soap and beauty products, modesty garments and intimate apparel in women's journals of the period. She charts the rise of a Europeanized "Modern Egyptian Girl," demonstrating the continuing influence of colonial modernity even after Egypt's de facto independence from Britain in 1921. Focusing on the progressive exposure of women's bodies in the interwar era, Russell argues that these images not only sold commodities, but were also linked to the creation of a new body politic. Paradoxically, the female body revealed in advertisements was "a white, fine-featured woman—whether she was clad in Egyptian dress or ultimately in fashionable European garb." The images of women served several purposes; they sold commodities and helped in the construction of new femininities and national ideals and identities. Russell's emphasis on the importance of women's bodies and gendered commodities in these processes raises questions to which the following articles turn in the postcolonial, neoliberal context of global capitalism.

Reina Lewis and Carla Jones examine newly established lifestyle magazines that specifically target Muslim women. Both take the fashion pages of these magazines as revealing internal debates about representation of the female body, practices of piety, conceptions of modesty, and consumerism. Lewis argues that a new genre of English-language Muslim women's lifestyle magazines has recently emerged in the UK (*emel* and *Sisters*), the US and Canada (*Azizah* and *Muslim Girl*), and Kuwait (*Alef*). This new genre operates within the logic of neoliberal capitalism, where identity and difference are mutually constituted through the

consumer market. Drawing from her interviews with journalists, Lewis portrays the widely varied missions and business strategies of these magazines. Arguing that “dress does particular work in the mission of each magazine,” she shows how the fashion pages become an arena where “style mediators” engage in the difficult task of mediating between the expectations of different faith communities, the demands and limitations of the marketplace, and the magazine’s mission.

Similar kinds of mediation engage the Indonesian Muslim women’s lifestyle magazine *NooR*, the focus of Carla Jones’s article. She explores the disjuncture between piety as “merely image (*imej*)” and piety as “a reflection of deeper material and spiritual transformation.” She poses this as a perceived contradiction between value and virtue which “cannot, or ideally should not, coexist in the same form.” However, the image of the piously dressed woman complicates this presupposition. As both a consumer and a sign of piety, modest yet attractive, in the pages of *NooR* this image turns virtue into value and vice versa. As Jones’s interviews with *NooR*’s editorial staff reveal, central to this virtue-value transformation is the magazine’s concept of “spiritual beauty,” which presents fashion and beauty as the outward expression of piety through commodities and consumer practices. This concept helps to counter critiques of superficiality involved in fashionable Islamic dress. More importantly, the rise of Islamic fashion and women’s enjoyment of that fashion in contemporary Indonesia show “the reverse transubstantiation of an exalted abstraction, i.e. the potentially redemptive role of religion in individual and national life, into a commodity that can be exchanged for value.”

The tension between the display of fashion and the modesty associated with the veil is the focus of Banu Gökariksel and Anna Secor’s article on women’s Islamic dress (*tesettür*) in Turkey. Some leading *tesettür*-producing companies claim that their products are appropriately Islamic and serve the Islamicizing agenda. However, Gökariksel and Secor argue that in fact “the fashion industry is actively shifting the frontiers and diversifying the realm of *tesettür*.” In their catalogs, *tesettür*-fashion companies market “a cosmopolitan lifestyle that embraces covered women within the pleasures of consumption, personal style, and beauty.” Yet in focus-group discussions conducted with consumers, women questioned the acceptability of these images and the lifestyle and

Muslim womanhood they evoke. Consumers recognized both the role of piety and the place of style, fashion, and personal preference in their own sartorial practices. Gökariksel and Secor's discussion underlines the "fissured and hybrid practices that emerge in the gap between marketing and embodying Muslim women's dress in Turkey."

Marilyn Booth's critical examination of the current boom in Muslim women's writings analyzes how it perpetuates an "Orientalist ethnographicism" that lends a "truth effect" to memoirs, autobiography, and pseudo-documentary works (as distinct from literary fiction) in translation. She relates their predominance in anglophone publishing to this Orientalist ethnographicism. Drawing from her experience translating *Banat al-Riyadh* (Girls of Riyadh) into English, Booth analyzes the making of a "Muslim" "chick lit" for the anglophone readership. Her discussion reveals how the Western publishing and publicity machines, with the author's participation, emptied out the political potential, linguistic innovations, and literary content of *Banat al-Riyadh* in its Saudi context. Her analysis reveals that only certain kinds of "marketable" authors and literature make their way into the global book market, reifying certain essentialized interpretations of "Muslim women."

Nawal El Saadawi's Brief Communication reflecting on her own experiences with the publishing industry speaks to some of the same issues raised by Booth. Amal Amireh (2000) has discussed the marketing of Muslim women writers to foreign audiences and the consumption of images tailored for the public readership. While Amireh focused on the role of Western political imperatives in this process, here we emphasize how paradigms of consumerism give expression to faith-based identities. El Saadawi's early work, both her critical and her fiction writings, probed the relationship between women's bodies and the consumer market. Women's bodies are objects circulated among men, extracted for their labor and sexual value (McLarney 2009b). El Saadawi's searing critique of middle-class marriage as prostitution paralleled analogous critiques in Western feminism published at about the same time.<sup>5</sup>

The trope of veiling continues to inform much of this work, as El Saadawi talks about unveiling the mind, Booth about "'unveiling' the Muslim female author," Gökariksel and Secor about marketing tesettür-fashion, Russell about the unveiled "Modern Egyptian Girl," Lewis about balancing images that reveal and conceal, and Jones about the nature

of “spiritual beauty.” These articles discuss how women negotiate the requisites of accepted Islamic practice in response to pressures that are not only religious and social but economic and commercial. The authors explore how the objectives of piety and those of the market converge on some points and diverge on others. Western theories of the development of capitalism traditionally assume that a new secular rationality will take hold in society and undermine or limit the role of religion. This issue, on the contrary, demonstrates the mutual capitalization of religion and the market. The points where they diverge—in the tensions and oppositions between capitalism and piety—cause anxiety about virtue traded for commercial value. Here we explore both the benefits and the costs of that mutual capitalization.

## NOTES

1. The history of capitalist economic development in the Middle East has been analyzed by many scholars. See Pamuk’s work on the economic history of the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East (1987; Owen and Pamuk 1998). There is also a sizeable scholarship on the significance of consumption in different Muslim societies and its role in constructing nationalism as well as ethnic, gender, and class differences. See for example Reynolds 2003; Salamandra 2004; Russell 2004.

2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno coined the term “culture industry” in their chapter on “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1995). They used the term to criticize mass culture as creating false needs that would be satisfied through capitalism. More importantly, they see mass culture as creating objects out of the masses and undermining the potential for subjecthood. While we use the term to highlight the centrality of commodities and commodification in today’s Islamic cultures, we depart from this original formulation in our view of the Islamic culture industry as not simply “deceiving” Muslims or turning them into objects.

3. Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002) discusses Islamist lamentation in Turkey over the “incorporation of Muslim ethics into the logic of a consumer market” (241). For example, a prominent conservative journalist rejected Islamic fashion shows on the grounds that they contradict Islamic principles of modesty and asceticism:

We have been defeated in front of the reality that one cannot be Muslim without being capitalist. What is the solution? There is no solution to this. For a lifestyle which befits a Muslim, one which emphasizes abstention from worldly pleasures, would paralyze all markets. If you were to remove the consumerist practice of fashion shows, the capitalistic structure would be destroyed. We are either, once and for all, going to remain under this wreck or we are going to, as long as we live, be entrapped in imperialism’s vicious circle of debt in continuing to sell Islam to one another. (Atilla Özdür, “Bu Son Yazıdır” [This is the last article], *Vakit*,

November 11, 1994, 4, quoted by Navaro-Yashin 2002, 242)

4. The view that Islam and capitalism are inherently antithetical often circulates through the writings of journalists (such as Thomas Friedman) in European and North American popular mainstream media. These writings deny the long history of capitalist forms of production and consumption in many Muslim societies and often present capitalism, especially in its neoliberal, free-market form, as an “antidote to Islam” and a precursor to “spreading democracy.” While Friedman (2000) and others see Muslim societies as not being capitalist enough, Islamic puritanists as well as secularists criticize the new religio-economic formations of “Islamic capitalism.”

5. El Saadawi’s critical work *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1980) and her novel *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) discuss in tandem the material dimensions of the marriage market and the marketing of women’s bodies in advertisement.

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