

Editorial

## Introduction: Fashion/Religion Interfaces

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The complex interconnections between religious beliefs and fashion in clothing have been increasingly recognised by researchers, already since the ‘new veiling’ phenomenon spread across the Muslim world in the 1970s ([El-Guindi 1981, 1999](#); [MacLeod 1987, 1992](#)), and especially since the extreme politicisation of the Muslim veil in the 2000s and 2010s ([Haddad 2007](#)). At the same time, fashion has increasingly begun to be a force that can shape religious communities as well as create debates, often of a controversial nature, within and between faiths ([Almila 2019](#); [Tarlo 2013](#)). By focussing on both Christianity and Islam, this special issue opens new areas of enquiry on fashion/religion interfaces.

Interface is a point where two systems meet and, more importantly, *interact*. Although fashion and religion have been historically considered as strictly separate, and often conflictual, systems, such a distinction is also borne out of specific historical and geographical conditions, namely in ‘modern’ (western) Europe, where fashion was first institutionalised ([Lipovetsky 1994](#)). Emerging from the secularisation of the public sphere (particularly in post-revolution France, which was the primary centre for fashion institutionalisation in the 19th century), and in a time when religion increasingly lost control over other spheres of life, fashion’s association with the secular seemed unavoidable ([Almila 2018a](#)).

Yet religions have always had relationships with both dress and fashion. Many religions, such as (orthodox) Judaism, have explicit (gendered) dress rules and established customs ([Carrel 2008, 2013](#); [Salah 2015](#)). Monasteries, be they Christian or Buddhist, tend to mark individual’s withdrawal from the worldly, and commitment to the sacred, by a change of attire ([Lafontaine 2008](#); [Handa 2004](#)). Within religious systems, perhaps most notably in the Catholic Church, rank and position is often very strictly and elaborately marked with dress ([Keenan 2000](#); [Murdock 2000](#)). An individual’s holiness is likewise indicated by dress and appearance, such as wearing white clothes, as is said to have been the case with prophet Muhammad (see [Almila 2018b](#), p. 131). One could claim that it is not possible for religions to avoid interacting with dress norms and customs, nor to be completely free of current-day fashion systems. Indeed, the very declaration of not being part of the fashion system is a form of interaction that can be read as an anti-fashion statement, rather than a full separation from fashion. No-one is fully outside of fashion systems today ([Wilson 1985](#)).

It has been argued that, for decades already, ‘western’ fashion industries have been involved in the aestheticization of Christianity, thus providing opportunities for new kinds of religious self-expression, especially in the US ([Neal 2019](#)). Italian fashion designers’, such as Versace’s, multi-layered use of Christian symbolism in haute couture was one prominent element in the *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* exhibition in the MET museum in New York in 2018 (.). Meanwhile, international and transnational modest fashion companies and initiatives, serving individuals from different faith groups, have emerged and grown in scale ([Lewis 2013](#)). Responding to extensive demand by middle-class Muslims in possession of considerable amounts of economic capital, Islamic cultural industries are increasingly developed and developing, providing goods for consumption, as well as leisure services, considered *halal* (permissible—as opposed to *haram*, forbidden) according to Islamic doctrines ([Abaza 2007](#); [Almila 2018b](#); [Gökarıksel and Secor 2010](#); [Jones 2017](#); [Kelly 2010](#); [Lewis 2015](#); [Tarlo and Moors 2013](#)). These are the types of concerns and questions that frame the contributions to

this special issue. Fashion and religion very much operate between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, mixing up and complicating what has often been taken as a straightforward division.

The first three papers in this special issue explore the complexities between Christianity and fashion, respectively considering theology, fashion and film, and sectarian dress. Alberto Fabio Embrosio makes a case for theology of fashion, arguing that a new theologically grounded approach to ethics and aesthetics is needed, instead of the more common moralising discourses that have tended to define Christianity’s relationship with fashion. He sees such an intersection between theology, dress, and fashion as potentially beneficial for understanding and improving both theology and ethical considerations to do with issues such as fashion, environmental deprivation and responsibility. David Inglis and Chris Thorpe’s article takes a very different angle on Christianity, and Catholicism in particular. In a thorough analysis of Federico Fellini’s ‘papal fashion show’ (in film *Fellini-Roma*), they demonstrate the multiple readings it is possible to employ in order to understand this (in)famous and much discussed (although very rarely by scholars) film sequence—most strikingly, as a ‘camp’ commentary on Catholicism. Anna-Mari Almila, on the other hand, takes a historical approach to understanding the 200-year history of a Christian Protestant Revivalist sect/movement known as ‘körötti’ in Finland. She argues that no matter how strict symbolic boundaries a religious group seeks to establish through dress, these boundaries are always porous and subject to fashionable and other types of change. Thereby, a religious dress style is always a construction of the religious/ political/social, as well as fashion and material conditions.

Together these three articles make a strong argument for the exploration of dress and fashion’s roles in Christianity, contributing to a field of study overwhelmingly dominated by research on Muslim fashions. While the major scholarly, as well as political, focus has recently been on the relations between Islam and fashion, especially in terms of veiling, people with other religious affiliations must also make choices regarding fashion and dress issues, and these choices are worth researching just as much as the more politicised phenomenon of Islamic veiling.

The next three papers focus on forms of Islam and fashion, in the complex political-cultural-religious-economic situations of Iran and Turkey respectively, and in the more specific case of Muslim brides in Brazil. Faegheh Shirazi reveals the extreme complexity of the multi-layered meanings of veiling in a historical setting where the hijab was first banned, then required by law. When mixed motivations and agendas, as well as different means of enforcing veiling, meet, the reading of meanings embedded in veiling require an extremely thorough and detailed analysis, sensitive to the specific cultural and socio-political conditions. Özgür Olgun Erden takes slightly different approach to the Turkish case, arguing that fashion consumption is part and parcel of the religious rhetoric and values that ordain also a new kind of middle-class religious work ethic in Turkey. Such new religiously driven practices and ways of identification have occurred in the wider frame of transformation of class structures, as well as economic transformation towards (neo)liberal capitalism. Finally, Gisele Fonseca Chagas and Solange R. Mezabarba focus on the special event of marriage and wedding in the lives of Brazilian Muslim women. Their analysis demonstrates how Muslim brides negotiate different kinds of histories and moral codes in their search for ‘modest authenticity’—beauty ideals informed by religious normativities and local wedding attire histories (underpinned by European influences), as well as ‘Islamic’ wedding traditions and the religious meanings of the wedding ceremony itself. With their detailed discussion of each of the brides they interviewed, they draw a picture that, while being very local and individual, nevertheless shows the significance of communities and the wider social (and global) setting.

Thus, this special issue indicates the numerous possibilities there are to conduct research on fashion/religion interfaces. As two major socio-cultural institutions, often deeply embedded in local and global politics, the ways that fashion and religion interact are key to understanding many other phenomena, involving individuals, groups and communities, as well as nations and transnational institutions.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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