

Book Review:

Shopping with Allah: Muslim Pilgrimage, Gender, and Consumption in a Globalized World

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Shopping with Allah: Muslim Pilgrimage, Gender, and Consumption in a Globalized World by Viola Thimm, 2023, University College London Press.

Shopping with Allah: Muslim Pilgrimage, Gender, and Consumption in a Globalized World is an interesting investigation of a captivating subject, which skilfully explores a number of field-related themes that intricately intertwine gender and religion. The topic stands out as a pivotal contemporary global issue, capturing the attention of the new generation. It aims to shed light on the close relationship between and the impact of religion and gender in the ever-changing era of globalization. Throughout the book, the nexus between these two is woven across various sections, and only a quick look at the table of contents is proof of this insight. However, delving into the examples that the author has put together allows for a more profound comprehension of the subject.

In the current landscape of the Islamic world, gender takes centre stage as a significant concern. The discourse of the new generation places a heightened emphasis on gender issues and the intricate web of sexual laws within Islam. The intersection of gender and religion becomes a focal point and prompts the question as to why gender is perceived as *vulnerability* among Islamists or even Islamic philosophers? The author strives to maintain impartiality and therefore carefully studies the behaviours of the women under consideration. Pertinent to this is the less critical perspective of the book, where sharp or critical sentences are rarely observed. The author simply endeavours to test their hypothesis and present the results.

Viola Thimm's ethnographic study explores the confluence of Muslim pilgrimage, gender dynamics and consumerism, particularly within the Malaysian context. The author centres the narrative on the experiences of female pilgrims, exemplified by individuals like Hawa, who integrate the pursuit of traditional Arab clothing into their spiritual journey in Dubai. Thimm conducts a thorough analysis of the commodification of pilgrimage, gender roles, and the concept of 'spiritual shopping'. The study elucidates how specific garments, such as the *'abāyā*, assumes symbolic significance, serving as expressions of religiosity, modernity, and even a touch of allure for Malaysian women.

For instance, Hawa, who is a first-time pilgrim to Dubai, not only just takes the opportunity to embark on a spiritual journey, but also to acquire *'abāyās* – the long frock or dress traditionally worn by Arab women. Hawa's choice to combine her religious journey with fashion preferences highlights the complex interplay between spiritual devotion and modern consumer culture. Thimm's exploration doesn't merely scratch the surface of the shopping experience, but delves into the significance of the *'abāyā* by also presenting the stories of women like Farrah, who views the *'abāyā* not just as a piece of clothing, but a symbol of modesty and connection to God. This illustrates how material culture, in the form of garments, becomes a tangible expression of devotion and spirituality for these women.

During the study, we become acquaintance with Sofea, an *'abāyā* designer, who emphasizes the importance of modesty in her relationship with Allah. Sofea's perspective adds depth to the exploration of how individuals within the pilgrimage context infuse their personal beliefs and values into the act of consumption, turning it into a meaningful and spiritually resonant

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experience. The focus on *'abāyā*, as a gendered object, becomes a symbolic act through which Malaysian women express not only their religiosity but also their modernity and, intriguingly, a hint of sensuality. Thimm's ethnographic lens captures the multifaceted nature of these women's identities, challenging traditional gender norms and participating in religious negotiations on both local and trans-regional scales. Additionally, the study reveals how these female pilgrims navigate their identities within the familial structure, using the act of shopping and the symbolic significance of the *'abāyā* to redefine their relationships with both their husbands and Allah. This transformation within family dynamics exemplifies the broader themes of self-representation, gender norms, and spirituality embedded in the act of shopping during a pilgrimage.

By examining the evolution of pilgrimage-related attire, the study demonstrates the shift from a gender-neutral activity to a female-centric experience, potentially empowering women and girls. The *'abāyā* emerges as a central symbol embodying intersectionality; a material that intertwines manifestations of gender and faith. In essence, Viola Thimm's study goes beyond the superficial aspects of shopping and pilgrimage; it unfolds a rich tapestry of lived experiences, where material culture becomes a medium for expressing religiosity, modernity, and even elements of personal identity and sensuality. The study's detailed exploration and the use of examples from the lives of these female pilgrims provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between gender, faith, and consumerism in a globalised world. So is Thimm's methodology, which recognises gender and Islam as mutually constitutive identities and cultural practices, unravelling the intricate interplay between them. The text concludes with an examination of the concept of *din* in Islam, providing a comprehensive exploration of religious notions beyond the conventional understanding of the term 'religion'.

Thimm's work contributes to existing academic scholarship by emphasizing the intersectionality of gender, faith and economy through highlighting the agency and subjectivity of women, who are not necessarily anti-hijab, on one hand, and the economic dynamic of religious pilgrimage on the other. A notable strength of the book lies in the author's use of the live and fresh examples of Hawa, Farrah, and Sofea, to illustrate the multifaceted nature of the study's themes. And this is exactly why Thimm's study goes beyond superficial aspects to examine the impact of pilgrimage on familial dynamics and the evolution of pilgrimage-related attire. Positioned within anthropology, intersectionality scholarship, and Muslim pilgrimage research, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricate intersections of gender and faith in a globalised context.

The incorporation of the concept of *din* introduces a layer of sophistication to Thimm's exploration, surpassing conventional limitations and delving into the multifaceted dimensions of Islamic thought and practice. *Din* extends far beyond the narrow definition of 'religion', and encompasses ethical, legal, and social dimensions as well, and that is why Thimm's inclusion of this comprehensive concept allows for a more holistic understanding of the intricate connections between gender dynamics, religious beliefs, and consumerism.

In summary, *Shopping with Allah: Muslim Pilgrimage, Gender, and Consumption in a Globalized World* by Viola Thimm in methodological and epistemological terms, opens up a new venue for exploring the well-connected intersections between identity, religion, and consumption in the contemporary world.

Fakhereh Moussavi is a sociologist, writer and researcher, who has graduated in political science in France. A life in exile as an Afghan woman shaped her insight and perspective about life and sociology. As a woman who has navigated the complexities of living outside of her country for decades, Moussavi brings a distinctive voice to discussions on various socio-political issues. She is committed to leveraging her platform to amplify the voices of underrepresented communities, which underscores her dedication to social justice and equity; her numerous publications on women's rights in Afghanistan also testify to this fact. Her book on the mobilization of women in Afghanistan was published in 2022.