

Saskia Warren, **British Muslim Women in the Cultural and Creative Industries**, Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2022, 332 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

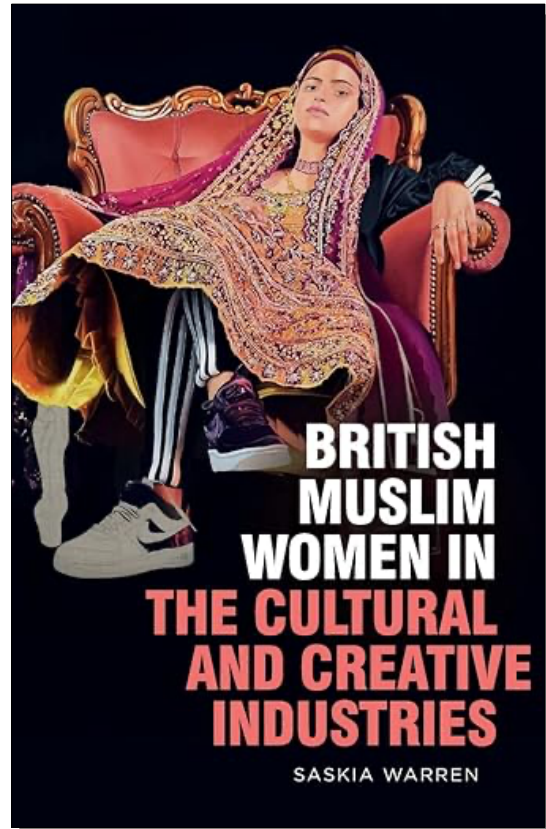
Reviewed by
Noha Mellor
University of Sharjah

Saskia Warren's book, **British Muslim Women in the Cultural and Creative Industries**, is a valuable addition to the ongoing public conversation about diversity in the British cultural and creative industries. The book, written in a clear, accessible style, goes beyond academic discussions. Warren shares her conversations with 120 British Muslim women, including artists and members of the public, mainly from Manchester, which has one of the largest Muslim communities in the United Kingdom.

The fieldwork for this project involves a wide range of activities such as conducting interviews, collecting artist activity diaries, organizing focus groups with members of the public and fashion students, conducting workshops with youths aged between 16 and 18, and cocurating an exhibition. The participants in this research are mainly from the South Asian diaspora, focusing on those of Pakistani origin.

This book delves into the political aspects of labor and the involvement of British Muslim women in fashion (including modest fashion), digital media (including vlogging), and visual arts. It explores the intersection of faith and gender with ethnicity, class, and geography and how Muslim women face Islamophobia, sexism, and racism. Additionally, it delves into how Muslim women's faith, creativity, and activism merge to make them cultural producers. The book also investigates the link between education, employment, and creative arts for Muslim women in the cultural and creative industries.

In chapter 2, Warren provides context for her research by highlighting the underrepresentation of Muslim women in the British labor market. Compared to non-Muslim women, Muslim women tend to have lower rates of paid employment. Warren then delves into the issue of diversity in the British cultural and creative industries (chapter 3) and focuses on the experiences of Muslim students in British art schools where the majority of students are White (chapter 4). Warren points to the affordance of social media platforms that have provided Muslim women a new avenue to showcase their talents and create content for other Muslim women (chapter 5), such as the YouTube channel of the social media influencer Dina Torkia. These women challenge traditional and Western perceptions of Islam, gender, and workplace



equality by negotiating new familial, community, and societal norms and creating new images of Muslim women. However, Muslim artists also face a challenge in balancing their desire for creative control with the fear of being accused of radicalism or extremism if their work relates to religious topics or British identity and politics (as discussed in chapter 7). This challenge is exacerbated by the rise of populism and Islamophobia, as documented in other studies (e.g., Zempi, 2020).

Warren's study zooms in on the lived experiences of British Muslim women in the cultural and creative industries. The author also sheds light on the experiences of less visible women, such as tailors, designers, and tutors working in small brands (chapter 6) and those in the visual arts, including those working with digital Islamic art (chapter 7). Warren also explores the connection between creativity and activism (chapter 8), arguing that Muslim women in the United Kingdom use creative and activist roles to challenge Islamophobia, racism, and sexism. By doing so, they create new spaces and representations of Muslim femininities while disrupting old norms.

Thus, the book responds to recent calls for the analysis of the experiences of minorities as cultural producers rather than just their representation in cultural content to help us better understand their cultural politics and potential for change (Saha, 2020). Warren's book does this by giving voice to Muslim artists. In chapter 6, for instance, Warren explores the complex experiences of Muslim women in modest fashion and textiles: While successful women in fashion and digital spaces may seem like evidence of strength and beauty, they also face conflicting pressures. Still, racialized distinctions in status and hierarchy exist in the modest fashion sector, where lighter skin is often seen as more desirable and valuable. In contrast, for those seeking work in mainstream fashion outlets, like Fashion graduate Saila, who was interviewed for a position at Laura Ashley, it can often feel like they do not belong. Saila felt "very, very out of place" as the only person of ethnic origin there (p. 165).

The book also provides valuable insight into the various Muslim communities in Britain, which consist of diverse ethnic groups. For instance, Azraa, one of Warren's interviewees, pointed out that despite being perceived as a homogeneous group, each individual within the community has their own unique identity and cultural background: "We're all perceived as kind of a homogeneous group, when you all have individual identities, individual strands of identities, you all kind of originate from different parts of the world, definitely" (p. 216). This diversity highlights the need for further research into the experiences of Muslim minorities from different ethnic backgrounds, such as African, Arab, and South Asian.

Overall, Warren's book adds to the ongoing discussion around diversity in the cultural and creative industries, where only a small percentage of workers are from ethnic backgrounds in fields such as design, film, TV, radio, music, and performing arts, despite the overall population being more diverse. According to available data, organizations must increase workforce diversity and leadership positions (Malik & Shankley, 2020). Previous research highlighted the challenges, including the precarity of work in the cultural and creative industries, which is not compatible with the needs of specific groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and working-class individuals. These inequalities intersect, making pursuing a sustainable career in culture challenging for many. Even unpaid internships, which are common in this sector and are mainly concentrated in London and other big cities, tend to exclude certain groups, such as working-class individuals, creating a barrier for those without the means to finance their careers (Brook,

O'Brien, & Taylor, 2020). Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who manage to break into the cultural and creative industries, especially outside of London, struggle to afford to work in the capital, which is a hub for media, politics, and civil service (The Sutton Trust, 2019). Additionally, obtaining funding from art organizations can be challenging, with non-White applicants often grouped under the umbrella term "Black, Asian, and minority ethnic," or BAME (Ali, 2018).

In light of these challenges, several British media outlets, including the BBC and Channel 4, have recently published their diversity charters to reflect the diversity of their workforce (Malik & Shankley, 2020). However, increasing the number of ethnic and religious minorities in these organizations does not necessarily guarantee diversity in the content produced. This is because ethnic minority workers may still rely on stereotypical representations of race, and having more representation does not guarantee creative freedom (Malik & Shankley, 2020). Therefore, the concept of "diversity" in the cultural and creative industries could end up perpetuating racial hierarchies instead of addressing the structural disadvantages faced by minorities (Saha, 2020).

To successfully include Muslim women in the cultural and creative industries, one of Warren's interlocutors suggests creating a merit-based system that disregards race, gender, and religion (p. 218). However, the British cultural and creative industries do not operate on meritocracy, leading to inequalities in both the workforce and the audience. These inequalities perpetuate the dominance of White, middle-class groups in production and consumption, resulting in uneven access to culture for both consumers and producers (Brook et al., 2020).

Indeed, the challenge in the sector reflects the challenge in society as a whole, with slow progress in social mobility. Therefore, efforts should focus on improving conditions for those without socioeconomic privilege and combating racism and Islamophobia across society. Failure to do so will harm social cohesion and may even result in economic loss by failing to tap into the growing Muslim lifestyle sector, which, as Warren notes, is set to grow twice as fast as the global economy, creating greater consumer demand worldwide (p. 12).

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