

The Commodification of Hijab in the West

News:

Recently in the United States, magazines have included socially popular Muslim women wearing the headscarf on the covers along with their interviews, with magazine editors priding their ability to diversify their media's platforms to the American public, claiming to break barriers.

Comment:

As I do not want to get into the details of who is on which magazine, that will not be my focus as I want to touch upon the bigger picture of such acts.

Allow me to start with the basic definition of 'commodification' which is the transformation of goods, services, ideas, and not least people into commodities or objects of trade. (Wikipedia)

Commodify is to treat (something that cannot be owned or that everyone has a right to) like a product that can be bought and sold. (Merriam-Webster)

Here comes the issue of the commodification of Hijab in the West. Hijab is taken out of context – not the Shari manner – rather the westernized version with a scarf thrown either casually or fully over the hair and shoulders with full tabaruj (often the case) with the women whose photographers capture their faces and bodies in the most appealing way possible all the while trying to capture the accomplishment of the Muslimah.

Posing in what may be interpreted as alluring and attractive manners is not the way to capture the essence of the Muslim woman in hijab... wearing the marketers or sponsors' clothing and products while not truly captivating the platform she believes. In today's day and age the camera lens is the prism in which ideas and messages are conveyed especially true when referring to the media and not face to face communication. Muslim women even if their intentions start as good and sincere to show other Muslim women in the limelight and to highlight their great accomplishments in the West especially since many hurdles are placed in their path to success since they number many from gender bias, to racial discrimination to Islamophobes all in one or way or another are wedged between the determined Muslim woman and her goals. So when she achieves great success in her actions, it is applaudable for her to convey her efforts and inspire other Muslim women and girls.... Here come the claws of money hungry corporations trying to turn a success story into a million dollar plus investment.

Tapping into or shall I say drilling into this market, capitalists see massive dollar signs as the Muslim women market is not limited to a certain ethnicity or region in the world as Islam is a religion which embraces all colors, races and origins, as other studies have proven women are the major consumers of apparel and cosmetics. Here comes the use of 'commodification', making money off people and their accomplishments or their principles that one shakes their head in disgust as how it occurs to tycoons to drill into this sector and consider it a viable untapped market! Examples of this are numerous from western designed abayas to Muslims sponsoring cosmetics to sportswear to burkinis. We have Muslim women trying to stay above this commodification and saying this is for the sake of dawah to inspire other younger more vulnerable Muslim girls to break the boundaries and push forth to be successful in one's work.

Here I want to bring attention to the words: 'one's work'... it is the actions that validate human beings and not only men's work while the women when wanting to convey their efforts and ideas are dressed in fanciful alluring outfits with full face makeup while the man is

dressed neatly and modestly. Here is the double standard that is inherent in western ideology where women are constantly objectified and commodified.

Women of all colors and religions are negatively affected by this sickening western mindset – women’s achievements reduced to appearance and not any appearance – they are held to western beauty standards so we as a public base rarely see women of great accomplishment who are aged or not as beautiful with ‘supermodel’ qualifications being interviewed in her regular Islamic outfit because that would not sell according to western commercial standards. Or her being in her actual state of work such as the laboratory or school or hospital since that would be mediocre and mediocre does not sell – controversy, allure, lust, sexualized objects that appeal to the senses and instincts – that’s what makes millions of dollars and if that happens to be Muslim ‘commodity’ so be it. It may be a bit shallow to assume that the US’s aim is to display the diversity of their country and their citizens. If that were the case, the government policies would work to incorporate harmonious domestic policies that attain gender and ethnic equality in various sectors and eradicate racism, and not the opposite carving out new hatreds such as Islamophobia.

It is of utmost danger that Muslim women view the hijab as a fashion statement to society. Hijab is under fierce attack of being reduced to mere fabric in western society and we as Muslimahs must respond vehemently to this attack. Here comes the role of dawah carrying to others the underlying reason why women in Islam dress in hijab that is the embodiment of the pious Muslim woman and here I point out that some attack full hijabi clad women of being religious while scarf-wearing Muslimahs are more moderate and would be accepted more easily in western society. This mentality is a warped sense of the hijab concept, as this is a command from Allah and He Alone knows the intentions and secret acts of His Creations so using this argument here would be null.

It is vital that Muslim women and girls portray the correct image of Islam – even more importantly to display the correct concepts of Islam so if that means if one is only capable of personifying the hijab, then do so in the way that Allah the Creator wanted and commanded us to do so and not by personifying the western liberal hijab that combines the tabaruj and their ideals. Embody the qualities that Allah (swt) called for: modesty, strength, intelligence, honor, dignity, courage, inspiration, encouragement, calling for the ma’rouf (good), all these qualities and much more are embodied in this one command – the command of full hijab—by this one can inspire the women and girls struggling with hijab due to fear of harassment or unacceptance or attack. It is true that women in Muslim lands can easily and more acceptably wear the full hijab than it is in western lands where Muslims unfortunately may face and deal with Islamophobia where the society that has been drenched with warped and false depictions of Islam and women in Islam. Here as Muslim role models to these females, we explain concepts that will give strength and courage to wear the hijab with the full confidence despite any forms of rejection or harassment that one may be exposed to and to break the negative damaging stereotypes being forced upon the unknowing people – it is all for the sake of Allah (swt) and He Alone will reward the wearers of hijab the high reward and His Reward increases for those who struggle the most with complying to His Commands. So for Muslim women the issue is not fabric covering the hair and body but it is the submission to the commands to Allah The Most Wise Most Aware. Do not allow our Muslimahs or their ideals to be commodified, our Islam is not a commodity available to the highest bidder.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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