

News & Comment

The Hijab is a Sexualisation of the Women or a Condemnation of her Sexuality

I find this allegation the strangest one with regards to the hijab in the West. It reminds me of a newspaper headline I responded to some years ago when the deputy editor of the *Times* wrote about how '*Muslim men can't control their urges*'.

When addressing this allegation with non-Muslim neighbours, colleagues, I think the question we need to simply ask, is again look at the society around us, what is it that has made the woman the object for desires? Is it a couple of yards of cotton cloth wrapped around a Muslim woman? Or is it a society where lap dancing clubs, men's magazines, page 3 girls, celebrities with perfect figures wearing close to nothing, pornography, an advertising industry that uses a half naked woman to sell tickets to the motor show? It is more than clear that it is within free, secular liberal society women have been reduced on every sphere to something you gawp at and just use for that purpose.

To the point that even young girls are conscious about how beautiful they should look. It is a society, steeped in this view of the woman, which dominates, which now looks at the Muslim woman as someone who is sexualised!

The message of the hijab is anything but sexualisation – actually the opposite is the case. It is only because we live in a society where the man and woman relationship is only viewed this way, which sees everything through this view, which makes them assume that Muslim men must also see their women in this way – They just cannot see it any other way! When in reality, it is one in ten western women in Britain who experience some form of sexual assault.

And even this idea that Muslim women are sexualised has its root in the misconceptions the West always had about the Muslim world. When the Orientals looked at the Muslim world centuries ago, it was they who began to write about women in this way. Just because they could not access them as easily, and they were somewhat 'mystic' all these images were conjured about women of the Muslim world, being chained to harems and being concubines hidden away.

The opposite accusation, that the hijab makes the woman ashamed of her sexuality, is just as ludicrous. How can the woman who seeks to take charge of her sexuality and be in total control of who can exploit her femininity by covering herself up, be the woman who is ashamed of herself? Rather the truth is it is the Muslim woman who has regained control of how people view her, unlike many women in the West who have allowed their external self to become everyone's business. And furthermore this idea of the woman being blameworthy for the downfall of man, through her tempting and therefore her sexuality, actually has its roots in Christianity. From Eve enticing Adam with the apple – This is not the Islamic view. The woman and her femininity is not a source of shame in Islam.

Rather the Islamic dresscode, the hijab, is one law within a comprehensive social system which seeks to honour women. Hijab actually takes the external appearance of the woman out of society, so that she can be valued in society for her character and contributions – Not the way she looks. Muslim men in work, public life can value her for who she is, in line with the Islamic view of women being an honour.

Therefore we must be proactive in dispelling such myths about Islam and the Islamic dresscode.

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