

Billboard in Dallas “Aims to Dispel Misconceptions About Hijab”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



[The report Friday](#) about the new Islamic propaganda billboard in Dallas recalled the billboard that propagandists for Islam [put up in the same city last February](#) by the same organization, beside a well-trafficked highway. It was up for six weeks. This one was all about the hijab, what it means for Muslim women, why they are so enthusiastic about wearing it, and why non-Muslims are so wrong in thinking it is a form of repression.

Ruman Sadiq, a local Muslim activist, says the current political climate has led to misperceptions of Muslim women.

That's why she hopes a new six-week billboard campaign will encourage people to call and ask questions about the hijab, or head scarf.

Could those misperceptions of Muslim women be the result of learning about women who have been arrested and imprisoned in Iran for taking off their hijabs in protest at being forced to wear them? Could those misperceptions have something to do with the morality police in Iran beating women for wearing an "insufficient" head covering? Or did the news about the arrest of a Saudi woman who merely tweeted a picture of herself at home without a hijab make an impression? What else might have led to "misperceptions of Muslim women"? Possibly Aqsa Parvez's Muslim father, who choked her to death with her hijab after she refused to wear it. Or the story of Amina Muse Al, a Christian woman in Somalia whom Muslims murdered because she wasn't wearing a hijab. Or the forty women who were murdered in Iraq in 2007 for not wearing the hijab? Or the tale of Amira, an Egyptian girl who committed suicide after being brutalized by her family for refusing to wear the hijab. There is Alya Al-Safar, whose Muslim cousin threatened to kill her and harm her family because she stopped wearing the hijab in Britain. Amira Osman Hamid was whipped in the Sudan for refusing to wear the hijab. Muslim and non-Muslim teachers at the Islamic College of South Australia were told that they had to wear the hijab or be fired. Women in Chechnya were shot with paintballs by the police because they weren't wearing hijab; other women in Chechnya were threatened by men with automatic rifles for not wearing hijab; elementary school teachers in Tunisia were threatened with death for not wearing hijab; Syrian schoolgirls were forbidden to go to school unless they wore hijab; women in Gaza were forced by Hamas to wear hijab; women in London whom Muslim enforcers threatened to murder if they didn't wear hijab; the anonymous young Muslim woman who removed her hijab outside her home and started living a double life in fear of her parents, and all the other women and girls who have been killed or threatened, or who live in fear for daring not to wear the hijab. Perhaps these cases, and thousands more less widely reported on in the Western world, have resulted in the "misperception" many in the West have about Muslim women and the hijab.

“It’s very difficult at times for Muslim women to go out in public wearing a veil,” said Sadiq, an outreach volunteer with the Dallas Chapter of the Islamic Circle of North America. “We face a lot of discrimination in educational institutions, in the supermarkets and public arenas.”

Vague allusions to “discrimination” against Muslim women wearing a veil does not constitute proof, and we have many examples of claims of victimhood by Muslims involving the hijab that later proved false. What kind of “discrimination” does Sadiq have in mind? In the current climate of hypersensitivity about appearing to be “Islamophobic” in the slightest, and the determination to uphold “diversity” as the highest value, surely we are entitled to be skeptical about these claims of widespread discrimination against women wearing hijabs.

The billboard – at Interstate 35 and Northwest Highway in Dallas – features a woman wearing a hijab, along with a 1-800 number and the words: respect, honor and strength. The Islamic Circle partnered with a Chicago-area based group GainPeace to place the billboard in Dallas. Other billboards have gone up across the country, including Houston and Chicago.

Members of the Dallas chapter of the Islamic Council of North America and Chicago-based GainPeace spoke Thursday during a press conference about a new billboard campaign.

The groups want to show that the hijab is a sign of empowerment and that women of other religions also cover their heads. They point to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who wore a veil, and nuns.

“It is also a form of liberation from strangers who dictate how women should dress in the society to be successful,” Sadiq said. “It’s to free us ourselves from being judged by our physical beauty, but rather our intellect and our

character. It's to preserve our modesty."

Hijab is a "form of liberation"? Not to everyone, and certainly not to those many Muslim women and girls who do not wish to wear it, and have been threatened, or killed, for refusing to wear it. See the compilation above. Sadiq describes wearing hijab as freely chosen, to "preserve our modesty." But how can it be "freely chosen" when it is required by the Quran, at 24:31 and 33:58-59. and both the morality police, where they exist (as in Iran and Saudi Arabia), and Muslim menfolk, make sure it is worn by Muslim women and girls, whatever their private preference?

Members of the Islamic Council of North America displayed information about Islam, women and the hijab during a press conference in Dallas. Female visitors were encouraged to try on a hijab.

This "trying on of the hijab" is meant to acclimatize non-Muslim women to the hijab, by having them wear it – first learning from their Muslim sisters how to properly tie it – and playing at what seems to be merely innocuous make-believe. And what fun to capture oneself wearing a hijab on a selfie to later show friends and family: "Yes, that's me in the hijab! They even let me keep one. I think I might wear it for a while, just to show solidarity with my new Muslim sisters." The real significance of the hijab, as one more requirement imposed on Muslim women, whether they want it or not, is not understood.

The billboard is already drawing attention and phone calls. Sadiq talked about an hour-long phone call the group received from an angry caller, who was upset about the billboard.

"It was a 62-minute dialogue that we had with her and it ended on a very positive note," Sadiq said. "She was very happy to clarify the misconceptions she had about the veil."

One of those “misconceptions” was undoubtedly the belief that Muslim girls and women are forced to wear hijab. But that is no “misconception”; it’s the dismal truth. Of course some girls and women willingly wear the hijab. But the point being made by the billboard and the propagandists behind it, who are just a phone call away, is that wearing the hijab, or other forms of cover, is always a voluntary act. And that is not true. We know that many girls have been severely punished, or even killed, for refusing to wear the hijab. This is not mentioned, of course, on the billboard, or by those Muslim women manning the 1-800 phones, who are prepared – well-versed as they are in taqiyya – to answer any questions from curious Unbelievers.

Earlier this month, local Muslim women set up a table with information about Islam and the hijab at Clyde Warren Park. They also had various hijabs in different colors that women could try on.

Nahela Morales, also with the Islamic Circle, said women have a choice to wear a hijab and some choose to cover their entire face, except for their eyes.

What fun to try on the hijab! And there are so many colors to choose from! Why would any woman object to that?

“There’s no oppression on both as the Koran tells us there’s no compulsion in religion,” she said. “So, we do choose to even wear the head scarf. There’s women that do not wear the head scarf and that’s an individual process.”

What a strange sentence at the end – “There’s women that do not wear the head scarf and that’s an individual process.” Not “individual choice,” but rather, “individual process,” and that might imply that someone is going through a “process” of coming to understand the rightness of hijab, after having first rejected it.

Yes, according to 2:256, the favorite Qur'anic verse of the propagandists, "there is no compulsion in religion." But we know that, taken literally, it isn't true. Muslims who apostatize can be killed, as Muhammad says in the Hadith (Sahih Bukhari 9.57): "Whoever changes his Islamic religion, kill him." Surely that constitutes "compulsion in religion" for disaffected Muslims. And non-Muslims, too, endure "compulsion" when, having been conquered by Muslims, they are faced with the three options of death, conversion to Islam, or life as a "dhimmi," subject to many onerous conditions, of which the best known is the Jizyah tax. The only way for non-Muslims to escape the dhimmi condition is to convert to Islam. Millions have done so. Does this not also constitute "compulsion in religion"?

When Nahela Morales, of the Islamic Circle, claims with a straight face that there is "no compulsion in religion," she should be asked why Muslims who leave the faith are not allowed to freely choose another belief, or no belief at all, but instead face death. And she should also be asked whether she is willing to admit that many of the non-Muslims who converted to Islam over the past 1,400 years did so not out of belief, but out of the desire to avoid the dhimmi condition that has been made so onerous for non-Muslims?

Morales and Sadiq said people should appreciate the similarities in all religions, rather than be bothered by the differences.

Of course those differences shouldn't bother anyone. The misogyny, homophobia, antisemitism of Islam are trivial. What counts is that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are the three great monotheisms and abrahamic faiths, and besides, aren't "people basically the same the whole world over"? Who cares if it says in the Qur'an that Muslims are "the best of peoples" (3:110) and Unbelievers "the most vile of created beings" (98:6)? The propagandists explain: "Those verses must be put

in context; they don't really mean what they seem to say. These verses refer only to a particular place (the Hejaz, in western Arabia) and time (the early 7th century). They have no relevance today." Gosh, that's good to know. And why should we worry about the 109 verses in the Qur'an that command Believers to wage violent Jihad against the Unbelievers, and among them, the several verses that specify the need "to strike terror in the hearts of the Unbelievers"? Ignore that stuff; it's what the islamophobes like to focus on; they're always trying to divide us. We're trying to focus on what unites us. That's the only way forward.

So take in the mendacious message of that billboard in Dallas. There's bound to be one put up near you.

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