

Original Ad



**I AM NOT
WHAT
I APPEAR
TO BE**

DIESELREBOOT.TUMBLR.COM

The advertisement I've chosen features a topless, (presumably) muslim woman wearing a niqab. She is staring intently at the camera through the window in her jean-studded niqab, with hand on hip and a full sleeve of tattoos on her arm. This image is part of the Diesel Reboot campaign, a more or less simplified ad campaign using young creatives as models. Beside the woman are the words "I am not what I appear to be".

What is the message behind this ad? I believe it is "See, I'm like you, so like me already!" While Diesel is most certainly using this strategy to

emotionally connect with consumers over its “brave” branding practices, its means are culturally insensitive, orientalist in nature, and consistent with its other advertising which sexualizes the female body.

The ad is culturally insensitive for it is appropriating the very meaningful practice of veil wearing and attaching it to capitalistic enterprise, all the while disingenuously appearing to care about a deeply divisive issue. It is cynical opportunism at the least and cultural appropriation at the worst.

One might rightly ask what is the product here? And while Diesel does sell denim, and there is denim around the face piece of the niqab, the viewer knows full well that Diesel does not sell denim niqabs. So I ask, what is the product? Is it not the cultural appropriation of the *other*, the veiled muslim woman? It’s almost as if the orientalist discourse whereby the superior “liberated” West looks upon the inferior, repressed other is present here if we read between the lines. Emily Crosby writes that muslim women “use veils in order to retract their image from public consumption” (p. 55). Diesel has effectively stamped its brand upon the image of the muslim woman exactly for the purpose of public consumption and personal profit.

The Western gaze is apparent in this ad for it demands to see similarity in difference; the other’s acceptability depends on this display of westernness. The tattoos speak to a type of westernized, liberated woman, the kind that we are not supposed to expect from a veil-wearing woman. So this ad simultaneously reinforces the stereotype of the muslim woman while freeing her from it. However this “freedom” comes at a price for she must play by the west’s rules of being sexualized (topless) and bad-assed/ independent (tattoos). With this display, she is no longer so backwards or

unenlightened for with the showing of skin and tattoos she is now sufficiently like the rest of western women.

The Jammed Ad:



**AM I
ACCEPTABLE
TO YOU
NOW?**

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The jamming of the Diesel Reboot ad takes the original text “I AM NOT WHAT I APPEAR TO BE” and changes it to “AM I ACCEPTABLE TO YOU NOW?”. It was difficult for me to choose exactly what text I wanted to write beside the model for each had a slightly different message. I almost went with “Am I what I appear to be?”- which would cause reflection on what people think about muslim women, however I felt it was a bit too subtle.

The text I chose draws immediate attention to the differences between our own western ideas about muslim women and what we see before us in the ad. On seeing the model we must now reflect and ask ourselves if this is what another woman must do to be accepted? My text rejects the (re)framing of the muslim woman by western standards and shows the means by which women are often “freed”, notably sexualization (topless) and (western ideas of) individualism (tattoos). By having the the veiled woman ask if she has done enough to please her western audience, I am showing the absurdity of our standards for acceptance. In the original ad there is naivety in this celebration of her ‘liberation’.

“Am I acceptable to you now?” exposes the viewers own cultural bias. This bias, which is cultivated by media and orientalist discourses, produces unease around difference. The pointed question shows how society rewards conformity.

As a non-muslim woman I feel that the new ad also forces me to stop and question how I am forced to conform in society: how I am sexualized and even how I self-sexualize to be accepted? By looking inwards it all comes full circle for when I see how I am just another consumer, just another body to sexualize, I identify with my muslim sister and see her struggles in a new light. And understanding that for muslim women “to dress this way at such a time in this society is to silently and yet insisently refuse the imputed meanings of the inferior muslim other” (Ahmed, p. 250), is to begin to understand that her choice is complex and meaningful and not at all what the predominant western discourse would have me believe.

References:

Ahmed, L. (2005). The veil debate—again. In *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*. NY: The Feminist Press/CUNY.

Crosby, E. (2014). Faux feminism: France's veil ban as orientalism. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 15(2), 46.

