



Analysis of Nike Pro Hijab ads: the gaze of *‘Western people’*

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MA study program in Integrated Communication

GeSt Internship on Gender Studies in Kaunas, Lithuania, 3-7 July 2017



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Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union





Introduction

Today, in our multicultural societies, gender often means not only obvious differences between individuals but also social constructs;

In our societies we have multiple norms, relationship forms and stereotypes. And those things are reflected in commercials;

Woman's image in commercials – one of the most often topics.

Recently, Muslim woman image became an important topic in commercials.

Femininity of Muslim woman in Western creators commercials became discursive symbol and dictating social and cultural codes for all Muslim world.



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Nike collection Pro hijab

Collection *Pro hijab* suggested to see that traditional woman's wear can't stop her wish to be active and it's not related with cultural, religion, political or social circumstances.

Commercials were found as the best way to change steady stereotypes of Muslim world.



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Research

Object. Muslim woman represented in *Nike Pro hijab* commercials (produced by Western creators).

Objective. To examine commercials for *Nike Pro hijab* collection (produced by Western creators) and to find out what is the image of Muslim woman.

Goals:

- Find out how stereotypes about Muslim woman were created in Western world;
- Reveal Western people gaze to Muslim woman as a part of fashion market;
- Examine commercials for *Nike Pro hijab* collection and reveal differences between Eastern and Western traditions;
- Identify Muslim woman image in *Nike Pro hijab* collection commercials.



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Postcolonial creation of myth on Orient

Image of women from the Middle East

Colonialism is the establishment of a colony in one territory by a political power from another territory, and the subsequent maintenance, expansion, and exploitation of that colony.

Postcolonialism - human consequences of external control and economic exploitation of native people and their lands. Today postcolonialism refers to intellectual, aesthetical, scientific and cultural measures which constrains free human will.

Western pop culture has a big impact for eastern cultures in this process.



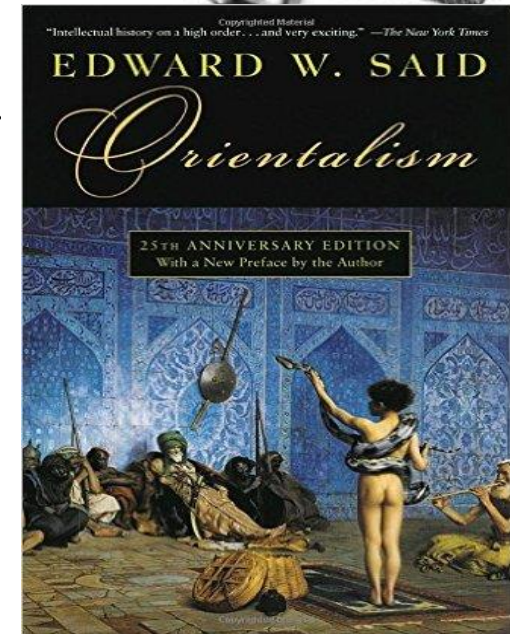
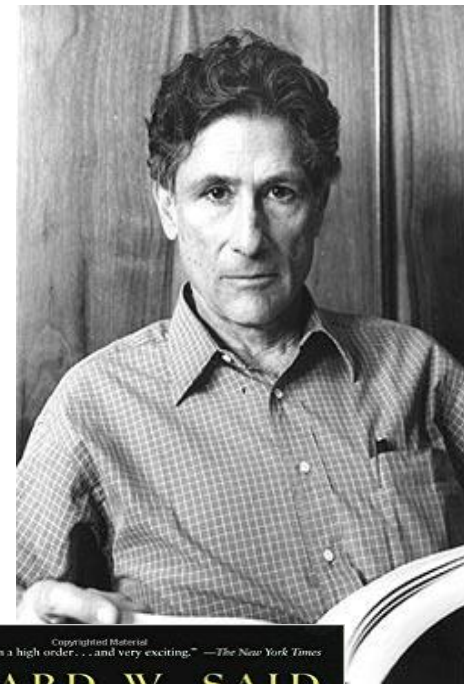
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Edward Said 'Orientalism'

Orientalism is a 1978 book by Edward W. Said, about the cultural representations that are the bases of Orientalism, defined as the West's patronizing representations of "The East"—the societies and peoples who inhabit the places of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. According to Said, orientalism (the Western scholarship about the World in the East) is inextricably tied to the imperialist societies who produced it, which makes much Orientalist work inherently political and servile to power



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Edward Said 'Orientalism' (II)

Myth on the Orient was created in centuries. It still has a big impact in the way how we understand Middle East and Arabic world. Orient in Western people minds is infantile, strange, people – defective, different.

Said: „One of the things which postmodern world gave us is that stereotypes about Orient is stronger than ever”

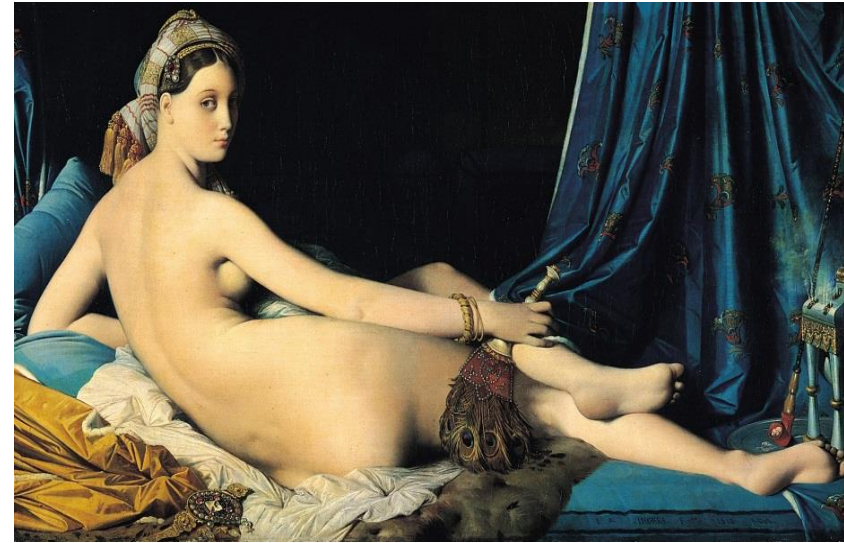


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Oriental woman image

Oriental woman image was created like a Western men fantasy. Orient was unknown world with unknown woman. And all not implemented sexual desires was projected for a fantasy woman. The one whose lifestyle is to fulfill all fantasies.



Jean August Dominique Ingres *La Grande Odalisque* 1814 m.



Gyula Tornai *In the Harem* XIX a.



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Oriental woman image (II)

Sociologist Adam Schwartz: cultural orientalism is alive nowadays. And the myth of Eastern Woman is still setting up. Today orientalism inspires pop culture. But we can't forget that times has changed and overall idea what is the East has changed also. Image of the Eastern world is closely related with Islam religion.

The main opposites today:

- 'Eastern people' vs. 'Western people'
- Christian vs. Islamist



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Gaze

Researches of visual theory suggested scientific definition of gaze – gaze is expression of power. One of the first ones who suggested definition gaze and define it as a critical thinking concept were Jean Paul Sartre and Michelle Foucault. Related to these authors – gaze is a expression and weapon of power.



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Feminist point of view

- Laura Mulvey „Visual pleasure and narrative cinema”
- Woman in cinema – an object of men’s gaze. Woman is portrayed, woman is monitored. She is the weak part because she is trying to look as the powerful one (men in this case) wants to see her. Woman is trying to see herself as the object which must be attractive for the powerful one.
- This theory gives an idea that in the culture of views, one is always a power (the one who watches) and the other one is the weak side (the one who is watched).



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Muslim woman in Western commercials

Muslim woman in these commercials is a weak side. She is the object of these commercials and she is made up by the Western commercial creator. Muslim woman is a symbolic figure which expresses Western world vision of the Eastern woman. She is the one who is portrayed, she is the one who is monitored.



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Fashion for contemporary Muslim woman: gaze of the Western people

Ieva Manta Valivonytė: „Fashion is an industry which always creates specific concept of simulacrum. It is not just creation of a product, it is also the way how people understand what fashion forward is which means original, contemporary, popular. Exposure of these items (in television, commercials, journals, social networks etc.) is presented as a simulation of desired and wanted social status.



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Fashion for contemporary Muslim woman: gaze of Western people (II)

Lately Muslim woman was discovered as an active member of fashion market. She can give profit and be an important part of fashion business.

Scholars Banu Gökariksel and Ellen McLarney claim: „Muslim woman was identified as a part of the fashion market with special needs and desires which are closely related with her Muslim identity”.



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Research methodology

Research method: **content analysis and semiotic analysis.**

Content analysis: selected Nike Pro hijab ads.

Analysis of 5 video and 8 photography.

Categories of semiotic analysis:

- Details of Western culture;
- Details of Oriental culture.



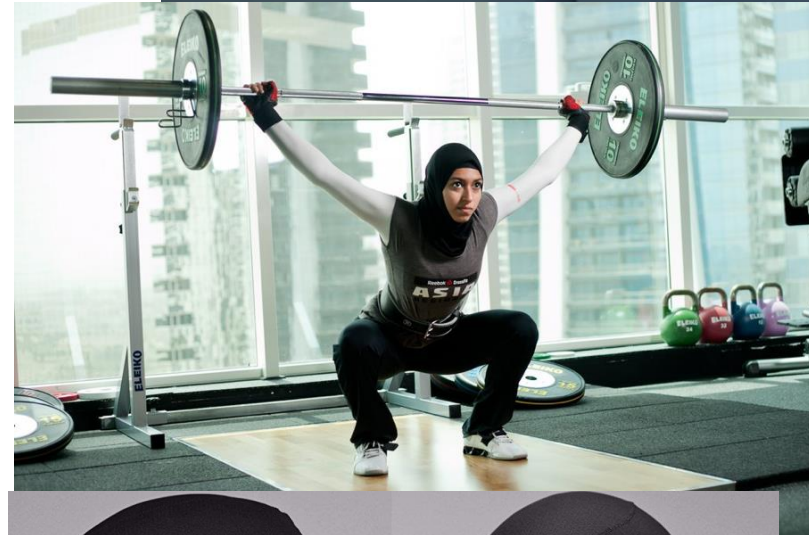
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Inspirational stories

The motto of the brand *Believe in more* encourage young Arab women to believe in themselves and seek something more in life than the others demand.

Nike introduces one of the three short stories that seek to create an innovative attitude towards Muslim women who, viewed from the perspective of the Western people, are constrained by various social norms and all their decisions are taken by men.



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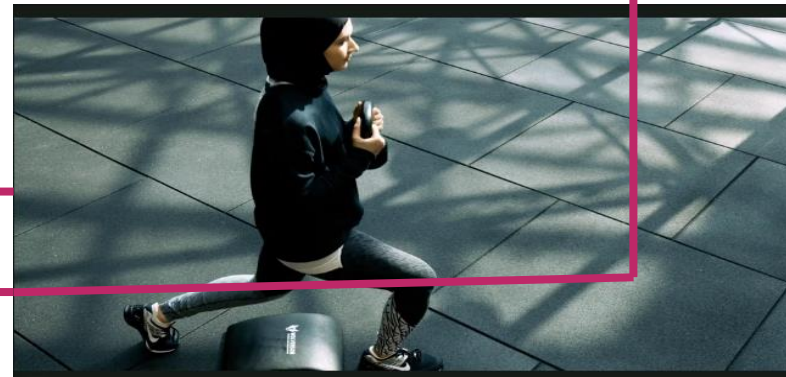
The inspirational story: Zahra Lari

The inspirational stories of Emirati sportswomen are being told by Nike through individual short films as an effort to encourage more women to get active and pursue their dreams.

The first Emirati figure skater Zahra Lari, 21, who is aiming to qualify for the next winter Olympics.

In the video we can see:

- Western architecture vs. oriental architecture;
- Consumerism vs. asceticism;
- Fast moving world (active life) vs. contemplation (passive life).



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Sportswear giant Nike tapped only Middle Eastern female athletes to star in their ad.



The photos depict:

- Traditions vs. modern life;
- Individualism, personal uniqueness vs. part of the whole person;
- Independence vs. others decide for you (family, husband)



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What will they say about you?

by Saudi artist Fatima Al-Banawi



In the ad we can see:

- A group of women outside vs. women in the house area;
- Individualism vs. homogeneous;
- Determination vs. acceptance;
- Colorful clothes vs. dark clothes.



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Findings of the research:



1. In *Nike* ads for the Middle East campaign where are more details of the Western culture than Middle East culture. In the ads we can also see contrast between these two cultures: Western architecture vs. Middle East architecture, consumerism vs. asceticism, fast moving world (active life) vs. contemplation (passive life), individualism, personal uniqueness vs. part of the whole person; independence vs. others decide for you (family, husband).
2. The portrait of Arab athletes in the ads is created as a Western culture woman's, where Arab athletes are shown as living an active life, are independent, individual, strong women, who is not afraid of wearing colorful clothes, practice male sports (boxing, parkour, weight lifting) and decide what to do in their lives.
3. *Nike* is a brand, which is searching for a new market segments, because it is business and the main thing is to create economic benefits. In all ads we can see *Nike* logo in almost every moment of inspirational stories. This sport brand wants to create the desire not just to buy things, but also to create a myth, that when women buy *Nike* sports wear, they also buy the feeling of changing society and moral norms.

