



[Screenshot of original posting of letter.]

A Collective Response to "To Be Anti-Racist is to Be Feminist: The Hoodie and the Hijab are Not the Same"

By : *Jadaliyya Reports*

Post

[The following statement was issued by a group of feminist writers, activists, and academics in response to a recently published article, entitled "To Be Anti-Racist Is to Be Feminist: The Hoodie and the Hijab Are Not Equals." It was originally published on The Feminist Wire, the publication that featured the original article. To sign on to this statement, please email sophia.azeb@gmail.com with your full name and institutional affiliation.]

To our friends and allies at The Feminist Wire:

It is with loving concern with which we, the undersigned feminist writers, activists and academics from diverse racial, religious, economic, and political backgrounds, write to this brilliant collective today.

An article recently published on The Feminist Wire's website and circulated via its facebook page has prompted this note. In her article, "To Be Anti-Racist Is To Be Feminist: The Hoodie and the Hijab Are Not Equals," Adele Wilde-Blavatsky attempts to address the important question of what it means to be an anti-racist feminist in the 21st century. Her article, however, serves to assert white feminist

privilege and power by producing a reductive understanding of racial and gendered violence and by denying Muslim women their agency.

In her article, Wilde-Blavatsky takes “issue with ... the equating of the hoodie and the hijab as sources of ethnic identity.” Oblivious to the important cross-racial and cross-ethnic connections and solidarities made in light of the tragic murders of Trayvon Martin and Shaima Alawadi, the author contends that the hoodie and the hijab cannot be compared because “the history and origin of these two items of clothing and what they represent could not be more different.” For her, Trayvon Martin’s hoodie signifies a history of racism, whereas Shaima Alawadi’s hijab signifies only male domination and female oppression. Revealing her own biases, Wilde-Blavatsky writes, “The hijab, which is discriminatory and rooted in men’s desire to control women’s appearance and sexuality, is *not* a choice for the majority of women who wear it. The hoodie, on the other hand, is a choice for *everyone* who wears it” (emphasis in original).

As readers on The Feminist Wire facebook page and website began to object to the piece, a respondent posting as “The Feminist Wire” (who later identified herself to be Wilde-Blavatsky), attempted to counter some of these objections by obfuscating whiteness and showcasing a lack of knowledge of the history and function of the hijab. To defend her position, the author cited her intimate connections with people of colour and informed her critics that “acknowledging the differences between women in terms of race, religion and culture” was politically divisive. We know these to be common defensive responses from those in positions of privilege. And our response is as common: “Listen.”

As feminists from diverse backgrounds, we value challenging, difficult, and necessary conversations on patriarchal violence within all our communities. We also recognize the importance of having an honest discussion about how racial hierarchies, discrimination, and prejudice differently impact racialized communities (for example, as blacks, Muslims and/or black Muslims). What we do find deeply problematic, however, is the questioning of women’s choice to wear the niqab and the presumption that this decision is rooted in a “false consciousness.”

We also take issue with Wilde-Blavatsky’s depiction of the violent motivations behind Alawadi’s murder. Wilde-Blavatsky states, “Scratch the surface and what is underlying racist fear and violence is an all-pervasive global culture of male power and domination.” In writing this, the author has all but stripped women of colour of an intersectional understanding of violence against women, one that is attuned to both patriarchal *and* racist violence. Instead, Muslim women and women of colour feminists are reduced to a piece of cloth and the experiences of people of colour and practitioners of an increasingly racialized and demonized religion are repeatedly questioned and denied.

To us, it is deeply troubling to be patronized by a person who insists the hijab is never a choice made of free will. But what is even more saddening is that such opinions are being propagated on a feminist

site with a commitment to highlighting the consequences of the “ill-fated pursuit of wars abroad and the abandonment of a vision of social justice at home.” The consequences of such wars have included the demonization, incarceration, and oppression of Muslim men, women, and children at home and abroad.

Wilde-Blavatsky’s desire to see “women as human beings first and foremost” is admirable. However, for many of us, the category of “women” is not singularly understood. We live our lives not simply as women but as people with complex, diverse, and intersecting identities. These identities – including religious, racial, and sexual identities – are not universal, absolute, or stagnant. Recognizing this is essential for building solidarity among feminists and our allies.

As feminists deeply committed to challenging racism and Islamophobia and how it differentially impacts black and Muslim (and black Muslim) communities, we wish to open up a dialogue about how to build solidarities across complex histories of subjugation and survival. This space is precisely what is shut down in this article. In writing this letter, we emphasize that our concern is not solely with Adele Wilde-Blavatsky’s article but with the broader systemic issues revealed in the publication of a work that prevents us from challenging hierarchies of privilege and building solidarity.

We hope The Feminist Wire will take our concerns to heart and initiate an honest conversation about privilege, racism, and Islamophobia within feminist collectives and movements.

Sincerely,

Ziad Abu-Rish, PhD Candidate, Department of History, University of California Los Angeles

Safia Aidid, University of Toronto

Sophia Azeb, PhD Student, American Studies & Ethnicity, University of Southern California

Abbie Bakan, Professor and Head of Gender Studies, Queen’s University

Nancy Barrickman, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Waterloo

Golbarg Bashi, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Liat Ben-Moshe, University of Illinois Chicago

Simone Browne, Department of Sociology, University of Texas at Austin

Syeda Nayab Bukhari, PhD Candidate, Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, Simon Fraser University

Lisa Bunghalia, PhD Candidate, Geography, Syracuse University

Fathima Cader, MA, JD, University of British Columbia

Carolyn Castaño, Los Angeles based artist

Josh Cerretti, PhD Candidate, Global Gender Studies, SUNY Buffalo

Sylvia Chan-Malik, Assistant Professor (incoming July 2012), Departments of American and Women and Gender Studies, Rutgers University

Piya Chatterjee, Association Professor, Department of Women Studies, University of California Riverside

Sabina Chatterjee, Centre for the Study of Gender, Social Inequities and Mental Health, Simon Fraser University

Elora Halim Chowdhury, Associate Professor, Department of Women's Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston

Christopher Churchill, Assistant Professor, History and Global Studies, Alfred University

Maria E. Cotera, Associate Professor, Program in American Culture/Latino Studies, Department of Women's Studies, University of Michigan

Jessica Danforth (Yee), Executive Director, The Native Youth Sexual Health Network

Huma Dar, UC Berkeley

Lamis J. Deek, NY-based Arab-Muslim Organizer-Activist-Attorney, JD 2003

Amal Equeiq, PhD Candidate, Comparative Literature, University of Washington - Seattle

Zillah Eisenstein, Professor of Political Theory and Anti-racist Feminisms, Ithaca College

Nassim Elbardouh, Gender, Sexuality, and Women Studies Alum., Simon Fraser University

Lisa Factora-Borchers, feminist writer and editor

Carol Fadda-Conrey, Assistant Professor, English Department, Syracuse University

Meaghan Frauts, PhD Student, Queen`s University

Trieneke Gastmeier, MA Public Issues Anthropology

Macarena Gomez Barris, Associate Professor, University of Southern California

Jasmin Habib, Associate Professor, University of Waterloo

Lisa Hajjar, Sociology Department, University of California Santa Barbara

Maria Hantzopoulos, Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Vassar College

Deborah Heath, Director, Gender Studies, Lewis & Clark College

Adrienne Hurley, Assistant Professor of East Asian Studies, McGill University

Fatima Jaffer, Interdisciplinary Studies PhD Student, University of British Columbia

Susanna Jones, Associate Professor of Social Work & Co-Chair, Gender Studies, Long Island University, Brooklyn, NY

Suad Joseph, University of California Davis

J Kēhaulani Kauanui, Associate Professor of American Studies and Anthropology, Wesleyan University

Dr. Laleh Khalili, Senior Lecturer in Politics of the Middle East, Research Tutor, Centre for Gender Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies

Farrah Khan, Violence Against Women Counselor & Advocate, Toronto, Canada

Brandon King, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and Anarchist People of Color member, DJ/ Visual Artist/ Cultural Worker

Molly Kraft, Geography MA, University of British Columbia

Jennifer A. Liu, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Waterloo

Jenna Loyd, Department of Geography, Syracuse University

Lorraine Halinka Malcoe, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University

Eli Manning, Gender, Sexualities and Women`s Studies, Simon Fraser University

Theresa McCarthy, Assistant Professor, American/Native American Studies, Department of Transnational Studies, SUNY Buffalo

Anne Meneley, Chair of the Department of Anthropology, Trent University

Dian Million, Assistant Professor, American Indian Studies, University of Washington

Salma Mirza, Third World History Student, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Professor of Women`s and Gender Studies, Sociology, and the Cultural Foundations of Education & Dean`s Professor of the Humanities, Syracuse University

Scott Morgensen, Department of Gender Studies, Queen`s University

Amitis Motevalli, Iranian and Los Angeles based artist

Catherine Murray, Chair, Gender, Sexualities and Women`s Studies, Simon Fraser University

Nadine Naber, Associate Professor of American Culture and Women`s Studies, University of Michigan

Mary-Jo Nadeau, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto Mississauga

Marcy Newman, Independent Scholar

Dana M. Olwan, Ruth Wynn Woodward Junior Chair and Assistant Professor, Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women`s Studies, Simon Fraser University

Margaret Aziza Pappano, Associate Professor, Department of English, Queen`s University

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, independent artist and performer, co-founder, Mangos With Chili

Nicola Pratt, University of Warwick, UK

Melanie Richter-Montpetit, York University

Krista Riley, Editor-in-Chief, Muslimah Media Watch

Robin L. Riley, Assistant Professor, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Syracuse University

Lynn Roberts, Assistant Professor, Community Health Education, CUNY School of Public Health at Hunter College

Judy Rohrer, Assistant Professor in Residence, Women's Studies Program, University of Connecticut

Samah Sabra, Canadian Studies, Carleton University

Dr. Jillian Schwedler, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Massachusetts

Sherene Seikaly, Assistant Professor, Department of History, The American University in Cairo

Simona Sharoni, Professor and Chair, Gender and Women's Studies Department, SUNY Plattsburgh

Loubna Skalli-Hanna, Ph.D, International Development Program, School of International Service, American University

Athalia Snyder

Tamara Lea Spira, President's Postdoctoral Fellow, University of California Davis

Itrath Syed, PhD Student, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University

Farha Ternikar, Associate Professor of Sociology, Director of Peace and Global studies, Le Moyne College, Syracuse

Sunera Thobani, Associate Professor, Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, University of British Columbia

Elizabeth Tremante, LA Art Girls

Amina Wadud, Visiting Scholar, Starr King School for the Ministry

Harsha Walia, activist, writer, co-founder of No One Is Illegal, Radical Desis, and Anti-Authoritarian People of Colour Northwest Network

Theresa Warburton, PhD Candidate, Global Gender Studies, SUNY Buffalo

Waziyatawin, PhD, Indigenous Peoples Research Chair and Associate Professor, University of Victoria

Laura Whitehorn, New York Taskforce for Political Prisoners

Bekah Wolf (Abu Maria), Social Justice Activist, U.S./Palestine

Cynthia Wright

Valerie Zink, Editor/Publisher, Briarpatch Magazine

[If you would like to be added to the list of signatories, please send your full name and institutional affiliation to sophia.azeb@gmail.com]