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Control of Women's Clothing: Forced or Banned

Without even trying, Moroccan football player, Nouhaila Benzina, has triggered an angry response from French media. Her crime? Wearing a hijab. At this year's Women's World Cup, people around the world celebrated and applauded Benzina not only for her exceptional athletic skills but because she is the first player to wear a hijab while playing football. French media has been rather vocal in expressing that it is not a win for women but rather it regresses them, moving to banning female football players from wearing the hijab. What French media and many other Western outlets fail to acknowledge is that banning a woman's article of clothing is just as bad as forcing them to wear it. Control is what regresses women, not the hijab.

Growing up, Nouhaila Benzina had not seen a hijabi play football before. Now, at 25, she is the first Muslim female football player at a senior tournament at the Women's World Cup. She is a model figure for young Muslim girls who wish to go into football and one day play at the senior tournaments. She is a portrayal of "you can do it too!" for Muslim girls around the world. Even with this representation and uplifting statements, Benzina has received pushback from increasingly islamophobic French media outlets.

In July, French journalist Philippe Guibert stated, "With her hijab, she is telling to her teammates that you are immodest. [The wearing of the hijab by a player at the Women's World Cup] is an incredible regression," This week, a member of the National Assembly of France, Julien Odoul, congratulated the French team on their victory over Morocco along with stating, "It is also a victory of the rights and freedoms of all women against Islamist ideology. The #hijab is eliminated!" It is clear that many individuals in France view the hijab as oppressive and controlling. Somehow, they fail to realize that their very action of banning the hijab and condemning it is a form of oppression and control over women.

The west tends to see modest dressing of women as oppressive, especially head coverings. They view any headscarf as something that is forced onto women. While this can be true for some women, many see the hijab as empowering and it is a personal decision for them to make alone. Forcing a woman to wear the hijab is oppressive. Banning her from wearing it is also oppressive. This is not a discussion of what is or isn't modest but it is entirely about control. It is about controlling how women dress; how they look; what they can wear; and what they can't wear. To spin a football game into a fight against 'Islamist ideology' is bigoted and damaging to Muslim women. Muslim women are free to decide on their own if they want to wear the hijab or be without it. Opposing it or imposing it is not liberating; it is dominating.

The freedom to choose is not to align with any one person's view of liberation. Wearing the hijab can be empowering. Not wearing the hijab can be empowering. The most empowering part of it all is the freedom to choose for yourself. True liberation is allowing for this choice to exist for all. We condemn the attacks on Benzina on her choice to wear the hijab. She made a choice to be a football player. She made the choice to play at the World Cup. She made the choice to do so in a hijab. Any person who stops this is not liberating her, but limiting her.

Wearing a hijab should never be forced or banned. We at Politics4Her emphasize this right to choose.

#WomensWorldCup

#NoForceNoBan