

Discovers Undesirable Significance of Sudanese Women in Sleeveless Dresses

By Bayyinah Sharrieff

After the success of our (the female students') meeting with the vice chancellor (vice president) of the University, of Khartoum, Sudan, we were all very happy and joy seemed to spread throughout the hostel to all with the exception of Miss Bryant (the old English house mother) who had not been successful in her attempts to bring discomfort to us. She remained silent and for a while did not bother any of us.

AFTER a few weeks had passed, Sit-Ruth, Miss Bryant's Christian Black spy, came to me with a message inviting me to have breakfast with Miss Bryant. This was a real surprise but then I thought that perhaps she wanted to compensate for the inconvenience she had caused.

I went to her veranda (a wide low porch with overhead) for breakfast that Wednesday (which was the day of the invitation) and found her appearance to be very cheerful.

Two Coptic (The Coptics are people who practice the old Egyptian Christian religion which reached its height in the 6th century A.D. and are descendants of the old Egyptian Christians. They are very light in color and dress very much like the people of Western societies) girls also had been invited to breakfast that morning. They were sitting with Miss Bryant when I arrived.

AS I sat down, I had the feeling that I was entering a trap. Miss Bryant began the conversation by commenting on how Western my clothes looked. She spoke in admiration of my American-styled clothing, and said that I looked very smart in the short, sleeveless dress I was wearing. She compared the practicality of the Western

clothing to the impracticality of the Sudanese tobe (national dress).

She said that she thought it was stupid and ridiculous for the women to cover themselves up so that not even their bare arms showed (when in public). I agreed with her that I saw no harm in wearing short, sleeveless dresses, as did the two Coptic girls.

I was not aware at the time that in the Sudan, only the prostitutes (who are all Christians—and this is no exaggeration) wear short, sleeveless dresses. When I went to the Sudan all of my dresses were sleeveless.

THE GIRLS were surprised to see that all of my dresses were without sleeves. One of them told me, after I had been in Sudan about two months, to cover my arms, even if I had to wear a jacket or a sweater. She explained to me that only prostitutes or girls of low character wore sleeveless dresses.

She said that she had watched me, and that I seemed to be of good character, and she warned me that I would be mistaken for a girl of bad character if I continued to wear the sleeveless dresses. She did not want me to be mistaken in that manner.

This already had happened to me prior to her warning. One afternoon about 1 p.m., I was strolling along the bank of the

Blue Nile behind the university with a Sudanese colleague named Lella (a medical student, who was one of the two muslim girls at the university who did not wear a tobe), when a car stopped and a man stepped out and invited me into his automobile.

AT FIRST Lella thought that I knew the man, and she returned his greeting. However, since he spoke to me in Arabic, she knew that his intentions were not good and that I had been mistaken for a prostitute. She spoke to him roughly in Arabic. He got in his car and swiftly drove off.

Islam teaches that women should keep their beauty concealed, and that they should not show off their bodies to just everyone. Ladies, your beauty is for the pleasure of your husbands. The arms of a woman are graceful and appear delicate. Much of the woman's femininity can be seen in her arms, and we therefore should cover them.

The Honorable Messenger, Elijah Muhammad, has taught us that we women

(Continued on page 19)

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(Continued from page 18)

must keep our persons concealed so that we may not be taken as cheap and evil women, but be respected by the nations of the earth.

AFTER living in the Republic of the Sudan in an Islamic society for 22 months, I easily can bear witness to the truth that the Honorable Messenger is giving to us.

The Holy Qur-an instructs the woman:

"do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head-covering over their bosoms. And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands,

or their sons, or their brothers..." (24:31)

THE HOLY Qur-an also instructs the Messenger to tell us how to cover ourselves so that we may not invite trouble:

"O Prophet, tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of Believers to let down upon them their over garments. This is more proper, so that they may be known, and not be given trouble." (33:59)

A woman receives respect to the degree that she respects herself. If we Muslim women respect ourselves and keep ourselves in accord with Islam, our habitudes will demand the respect of those who observe us.

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