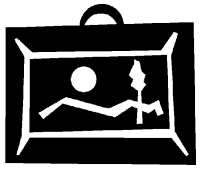
QUICK STUDIES



AS YOU SEE IT

Bad Rap for a Neck Scarf?

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Photo of Invincible with permission of EMERGENCE (www.EMERGENCEmusic.net). [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at journals.cambridge.org/mes]

Do purple designer kufiyas spell the end of Palestine solidarity?

Kufiyas, especially multicolored ones, started becoming fashionable U.S. urban hipster wear around 2005. They are so trendy, in fact, that *W*'s Meggan Crum called the restyled kufiya featured in French designer Nicholas Ghesquière's fall 2007 Balenciaga fashion line, and worn by Brazilian supermodel Flavia de Oliveira, one of "Fall 2007's Top Ten Accessories."[1] Meanwhile, over

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the last couple of years, kufiyas of all colors have been spotted on such celebrities as Mary-Kate Olsen, Kirsten Dunst, Cameron Diaz, Colin Farrell, David Beckham, Justin Timberlake, and even John McCain's daughter Meghan. In spring 2007, Urban Outfitters marketed the kufiya, in several colors, as an "anti-war woven scarf" until protests prompted the cancellation of the line—but not the sale of the item. It is available in the winter 2008 catalog, described now as a "houndstooth scarf."

Kufiyas have also become fashionable street wear for rap artists. In addition to Detroit rapper Invincible, prominent hip-hoppers like Lupe Fiasco, Kanye West, Jermaine Dupri, The Cool Kids, and Everlast have been spotted wearing kufiyas.

So, has the kufiya devolved, as many critics claim, from a symbol of support for the Palestinians to an empty fashion statement?

Consider the lyrics to Invincible's song "People Not Places" from her album *ShapeShifters*, which received a very positive review from *Spin* magazine (August 2008).

> Blue white flags
> For the Birthright tour I'm on
> Never mention three villages the airport is on
> Recent history buried but it speaks through the sand
> All Jews—law of return—I don't seem to understand
> A land without a people for people without a land?
> But I see a man standing with a key and a deed in his hand.

Here Invincible—who is Jewish—critiques the Birthright Israel tours, offered free to young U.S. Jews in order to foster ties between diaspora Jews and Israel. Invincible's purpose, she has written, "is to destroy the myth of a 'Jewish birthright' to a land Palestinians are denied the Right of Return to."[2] Abir (a.k.a. Sabreen Da Witch), a Palestinian–Israeli rapper from Lyd, makes a guest appearance on the track, which also features Arabic accordion music.

Invincible is one of only a handful of U.S. popular-music artists to broach the Palestine–Israel question in their music, and she is probably the most forthright and courageous of those who have done so. In addition, wearing the kufiya is an essential element of Invincible's hip image as a "conscious rapper."

Kufiya as hip fashion? Kufiya as a sign of political solidarity? These are not, necessarily, mutually exclusive. Scholars in Middle East studies need to pay much more serious attention to the field of U.S. popular culture than they have in the past. It is a domain rich with materials of great relevance to us—and it is not all "Orientalist."

NOTES

[1] Style.com website, http://www.style.com/fashionshows/collections/F2007RTW/editor/041207 (accessed 19 July 2007).

[2] "People, Not Places," Expressions of Nakba Gallery, the U.S. Campaign to End the Occupation, 2008, http://expressionsofnakba.org/gallery/node/85 (accessed 5 January 2009).

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