Title: I'm Muslim, but I'm not the Poster Child for Islam

I blog from the heart. I don't have ten blog posts in the que or any idea of what I'll say prior to. I basically blog about anything that pops into my head at the moment: an idea, a pattern, controversy, or clichés. A very disorganized blogger to say the least. But I feel that it brings about this certain spontaneity that I've come to love and enjoy.

Yesterday, I took a good friend and vintage store owner a hearty bowl of chili. She's just as wacky as me and we vibe. She wants me to headline one of her in-store events. Talk about perseverance and failure. As we chatted about the logistics and how I felt about the event, the conversation took an interesting turn as it usually does.

Now, she isn't Muslim but I am. Some days I'm an OK Muslim and other times I drop the ball, fall into a bowl of hot soup, tumble down a mountain, and land face first into a puddle of mud. Yes, it's true. Unfortunately, I'm not the poster child for Islam as many think or believe.

But let's go back a bit.

I told her that I may have a possible collaboration with a male model coming up.

"This might cause some controversy. Ya know because I'm Muslim and all," I divulged.

"This would be such a cool topic to discuss," she said. "Muslim women in artistic fields. Where is the line drawn between art and religion?"

I pondered the question. Where was the line drawn for me exactly? Then I thought of Noor Tagouri, the covered hijabi who was featured in Playboy earlier this year. How did she feel when she made the decision to collaborate with an established 'sex' magazine? Did she understand the 'Haram Police' backlash that she ultimately got? As a public figure, would I be tested with the same opportunities that went against my religious beliefs?

My friend then asked, "So what if Vogue called you right now and offered to have you on the cover of the magazine, but only if you pose with a man with his shirt off. Would ya do it?"

I didn't even have to think about it. It's Vogue for goodness sake! "I mean, I wouldn't have an issue with it, but I'm sure some Muslims would."

But then things got really confusing inside my head. As a Muslim woman, why wasn't I outraged at Noor for being in Playboy? Why wasn't I uncomfortable modeling with a shirtless male? What's wrong with me? Am I like half a Muslim or something? And the rocks started to fall. I thought about all the photoshoots I've done and my clothes being tight and risqué, the lipstick heavy, and I rocked a turban and not traditional hijab. What kind of role model was I being for young Muslim girls? Was I teaching them the wrong rules? Am I saying that it's ok to go against Islamic guidelines? Rules that are set for a reason.

Oh, boy.

When I first started blogging, I never said I was Muslim. If people assumed or asked that was one thing. But most people just thought I covered my hair for style purposes. Why did I do this? Because I didn't want to shame Islam. I didn't want people to get me confused with what a 'good' Muslim girl looked like. So, I hid it because it was easier. It's always easier to run away instead of hitting the issue head on.

On the flip side, I argue, what does an 'acceptable' Muslim look like? Sound like?

I haven't found out yet and I probably never will. I know so many Muslims on different levels of belief and life. Some are very horrible people, the scum of the earth while others are the sweetest and most caring individuals you'd ever meet.

One thing I do know is that art and expression is life for me just as my identity as being a Muslim is. Is it possible for religion, spirituality, and art to go hand in hand? Or will there always be a tug of war between these identities?

I remember when I was little, I wanted to take up ice-skating and cheerleading. Both had a uniform of tights and leotards or short skirts. Mom wasn't going to let me do them because I was Muslim and Muslim girls didn't show their legs and arms. As a kid, I was so limited. I couldn't do anything fun and be Muslim. I couldn't write stories that had characters making out and be Muslim. I couldn't go to prom with a date and be Muslim. I couldn't say anything wrong and be Muslim! Being Muslim as a child and teen wasn't an amazing time for me. I always felt restricted.

What I wanted to ask was what *could* I do as a Muslimah?

I believe that's why I am so 'out there' with my expression and art today because I was stifled for so many years. Unable to explore and experiment.

So to tie all this randomness in, I say that I'm not a poster child for Islam, but in saying that have I just become the poster child for Islam? LOL. Have I become what one of the 'real' Muslim women in 2016 looks like?

I don't know. You be the judge.