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Global Voices Information Sheet

France and the “Burqa Ban”



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What is a burqa, niqab or hijab?

- Many practicing Muslims, both male and female, try to dress and behave modestly to adhere to their religion. For many women, this includes adopting a code of dress that covers the body to varying degrees. These garments include:
- The **hijab** - a type of head-covering that is similar to those worn by nuns in Christianity and married, Orthodox Jewish women.
- The **niqab** - a veil that covers the face, leaving only a slit for the eyes.
- The **abaya** - a long-sleeved, robe-like dress that is worn as an over-garment.
- The **burqa** - an all-encompassing outer garment. The face-veil portion usually has a piece of semi-transparent cloth or mesh through which the wearer can see.
- There are many different interpretations on what is the proper code of dress. Some governments have sought to enforce their interpretations. Saudi Arabia and Iran use religious police to enforce wearing the hijab. In Afghanistan, the Taliban once forced all women to wear the burqa in public. Many human rights organizations have campaigned against these “forced veulings.”

France and the Burqa

- France is a strictly secular state, meaning that it tries to completely separate church and state. However, this can be complicated in public settings.
- In June 2009, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that the burqa was not welcome in France. He established a commission to come up with recommendations.
- On January 25, 2010, the commission proposed a draft law that would ban any all-encompassing veils in public facilities such as hospitals, public transportation and schools. Failure to remove the veil would result in refusal of service.
- France already has a law in place that bans visible religious symbols in schools. This includes hijabs, Jewish yarmulkes and Christian crosses.

Key Terms

- **alienate** – to turn away, transfer or divert
- **liberate** – to free from social or economic constraints or discrimination, especially arising from traditional roles or expectations
- **oppress** - to burden with cruel or unjust impositions or restraints
- **subservient** - servile; excessively submissive