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Banning the Burqa: France and the Specter of Colonialism

Sarah Edwards

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Central Argument

The passage of Law Visage-Découvert in France places the specter of colonialism on both countries, that of the former colonized and the colonizer. This ghost of colonialism creates anxieties in French society that lead to legislation targeting specific religious groups.

Colonization and Decolonization

- France began in North Africa in the 1830s
- Control over countries where Islam was prevalent
- Decolonization occurred throughout 1900s
- French memory attaches veil to anxieties of colonialism

Laicism

- Core value of France
- Appears in 1946 and 1958 constitutions
- Separates government from religion, maintains this distance.
- In France, Islam and laicism struggle to cohesively exist.

Similar Legislation

- Past legislative initiatives reveal Visage-Découvert was not in fact a sudden policy decision, but rather, a culmination of colonial anxieties.
- Legislation began in 1989
- Role of religion and schools - 2004

La République se vit à visage découvert

dans tous les lieux publics : voies publiques, transports en commun, commerces et centres commerciaux, établissements scolaires, bureaux de poste, hôpitaux, tribunaux, administrations...



Public Argument

- French policy makers and citizens alike argue the law is for security reasons
- Refusal to acknowledge the history with previous colonies and interactions with Islam which ended poorly.
- Ghost of colonialism prevails, fear moves passage of law.
- Primary religion affected: Islam

Gender

- Muslim women within Islam must change their habits, not the males.
- Role of women within these changes is questioned
- If women represent the nation, what does this imply about the French nation, or the nations where these Muslim women come from?

Recent news events

- The ghost of colonialism remains silent cause of policy actions and measures taken today.
- Islam targeted specifically, specter permits blame to shift to Muslims.
- Shootings in Toulouse and French reaction reiterate anxieties of colonialism that exist in French society.