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Burkas, niqabs pose public safety risk

The new bill in Quebec banning the niqab has drawn much criticism. Here Tarek Fatah talks about the reasons he supports the bill. More links below on other perspectives.

By Tarek Fatah

The Toronto Sun (24.10.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2iFaT9K> - The slur of “racism” has been hurled at Muslims who support Quebec’s Bill 62 — the new law banning face coverings, for example the burka and niqab, when giving or receiving government services.

From Ontario Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne to Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown, many white politicians and liberal media commentators have been quick to label any support of Bill 62 racist.

Since I, a Muslim, support Bill 62, I guess that makes me a racist.

Indeed, it’s not uncommon to hear whispers suggesting Muslims like me who support the burka and niqab ban are “sell-outs” within the Muslim community.

And that white politicians who oppose Bill 62 are trying to salvage the reputation of our community, despite our supposed betrayal.

After all, what do these politicians have to lose?

The political race to the bottom to curry favour with the so-called “Muslim vote bank” in Canada, as they see it, has worked well for both Conservatives and Liberals.

Charmed as they are by many second-generation radical Muslims who were born in Canada, some of whom hate western civilization more than their parents do.

But none of the attacks on Quebec’s burka/niqab ban was more disingenuous than one told by a well-coiffed hijabi on Canadian television recently, dismissing the public safety aspect of people wearing facemasks.

This young Muslim woman claimed there has not been a single incident where someone wearing a burka committed a crime.

To set the record straight, here are just a few examples of criminal activities committed by men and women wearing burkas and other face coverings in Canada:

- Two months ago, on Aug. 17, 2017, an armed robbery took place at a Scotia Bank branch in Milton, Ontario. Police said one of the two suspects was wearing a balaclava.
- On Sept. 9, 2015, two burka-wearing male teens charged into a Toronto bank in the Yonge Street and Highway 401 area. Both were later arrested in Ajax.
- On Oct. 14, 2014, two men wearing burkas robbed a Toronto jewellery store in the York Mills and Leslie Street area, and walked away with \$500,000 worth of gold and precious stones.
- On Aug. 18, 2010 an armed robbery by two masked men took place at a Scotiabank branch in Vaughan, north of Toronto.
- Ottawa police have in the past cited a handful of robberies in that city involving male suspects using Muslim women's religious garments as disguises.

Some of us will never forget how a young Toronto Muslim woman, Bano Shahdady, threw off her burka as she was divorcing her husband, only to be stalked by him disguised in a burka. He entered her apartment building and killed her in July, 2011.

It was a story few media were willing to delve into, but because I knew the family, one journalist did report about this burka-related murder that almost went unreported.

Around the world, numerous criminals have fled arrest wearing burkas, everywhere from London's Heathrow airport to the infamous Lal Masjid armed revolt by jihadis in Islamabad.

My plea to vote-grabbing Canadian politicians of all political stripes in English-speaking Canada is, for once, be honest.

Put the racist card aside and recognize burkas and niqabs pose a serious public safety risk.

Further reading:

[Quebec veil law Bill 62 sparks protests and confusion](#)
[Women in niqab speak: A study of the niqab in Canada](#)

NAFTA must include gender equality protection, Trudeau says

By Janet McFarland

The Globe and Mail (12.09.2017) - <https://tgam.ca/2h2q728> - Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says it is crucial to include protections for women in the renegotiated North American free-trade agreement because gender equality is an economic issue.

In remarks at a conference on women's rights in Toronto on Monday – organized by Tina Brown, former editor of The New Yorker and Vanity Fair – Mr. Trudeau said Canada negotiated protections for women's rights in a recently concluded free-trade agreement with Chile and hopes it will be able to persuade the United States and Mexico to add a similar chapter to NAFTA.

Mr. Trudeau said he has heard criticisms of his government's plan – not from U.S. trade negotiators but from conservatives in Canada, who argue that proposals to address issues such as gender equality, environmental protections and Indigenous rights in NAFTA talks are just "rhetorical flourishes" and that he should be focusing on jobs and economic issues. He said the failure to understand that equality is an economic issue "highlights that we still have a lot of work to do, even in Canada."

Ms. Brown has been convening feminist Women in the World Summits such as Monday's event – which was held in Toronto to coincide with the Toronto International Film Festival – since 2010. The events bring together activists, dissidents, artists, business executives and politicians to discuss issues facing women around the world. The Globe and Mail was the media partner for the event, the first of its kind to be held in Canada.

In her remarks, Ms. Brown complained about an emerging "global horror show of toxic testosterone," arguing that rights many have taken for granted are now under attack in the United States and other countries. When she looks at Canada, however, she sees "such an invigorating view of the future."

But Mr. Trudeau cautioned that Canada "is not a magical place" and that attitudes about women still need to change here and around the world.

"There's still so much to do, and we can't stop for a second to say we've done enough – there's so much more to do."

Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland, who also spoke at the summit, said she is "moderately optimistic" about reaching an agreement with the United States and Mexico to include chapters on progressive issues such as gender equality in NAFTA.

She said Canada is seeking to add similar provisions in all its free-trade agreements, including one with Israel that is being renegotiated.

Mr. Trudeau also spoke about his marriage and his family, acknowledging that his wife, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, "had to give up dreams" about her career and about how they would raise their children when he became Prime Minister. For example, he said, she had always wanted to home school the children while travelling the world on a sailboat. "Except you can't do it when you're Prime Minister and family," he said.

Asked if he would give up his career for hers, Mr. Trudeau replied, "Probably not this job," but "I would love in another life or another step of my life to be able to raise the kids and stay home."

Ms. Brown asked Mr. Trudeau about the role his father played in shaping his feminism. He replied that many people probably would not consider his father a feminist – including his father. He said Pierre Trudeau had some "old school" views and was a product of his time, but he taught his children fundamental values about standing up for everyone's rights and never discriminating against anyone.

Ms. Grégoire Trudeau also spoke at the summit on a panel discussing the representation of women in media and advertising, saying she suffered from eating disorders when she was younger. She said girls today are facing more pressure through social media and are exposed to too much "subtle violence" on television and other media.

"It's kind of what has become normal sometimes, and normal is the hardest thing to change in a society," she said. "I say let's redefine what normal is."

B.C. prosecutor urges 'strong message' in sentencing for child bride case

The Globe and Mail (30.06.2017) - <https://tgam.ca/2sBR233> - A special prosecutor has asked a judge to send a strong message of denunciation in sentencing a man and woman who took a 13-year-old girl over the U.S. border to marry the now-imprisoned leader of a polygamous sect.

Peter Wilson told a B.C. Supreme Court judge in Cranbrook on Friday that Brandon Blackmore should serve a jail sentence of 12 to 18 months, while Gail Blackmore deserves a six to 12 month sentence.

The former husband and wife were convicted earlier this year on a charge of taking a child under the age of 16 out of Canada for sexual purposes.

The trial heard that in 2004, the girl was secreted into the United States to marry Warren Jeffs, the prophet of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who is serving a life sentence for assaulting two of his child brides.

Wilson acknowledged that it's an unusual case and there's no volume of Canadian law to assist Justice Paul Pearlman in reaching an appropriate sentence.

But he said the sentence must deter other members of the secluded community.

"Deterrence might have particular importance in this case because other persons who could potentially commit the offence are, I would say, a very, narrow group," Wilson said. "The likely group of potential offenders is probably small and could very well be limited to other adherents of the FLDS as it's being espoused by Mr. Jeffs."

Wilson said Brandon Blackmore is more culpable than Gail Blackmore, but both were present at the wedding of the girl and knew what would happen. He said the teen and many women in that church live cloistered lives.

"The fact that the victim was 13 ... had spent her whole life in Bountiful, and was not what I would call a worldly person, which I submit would have rendered her more vulnerable."

Pearlman scheduled sentencing for Aug. 11.

The young woman, whose name is protected by a publication ban, was sitting in the front row of the courtroom.

Brandon Blackmore's lawyer said his client, who is 71, was ex-communicated in 2012 and has no contact with any of the members of his former church.

John Gustafson said his client has begun to have some insight about his actions, but was "taught his whole life that Warren Jeffs was God's representative on earth."

He asked for a conditional sentence, a form of house arrest, for his client.

"He is not in a position, even if he wanted to, to commit these acts again," Gustafson said.

Gail Blackmore, 60, declined to say anything during sentencing but Joe Doyle, a lawyer appointed as a friend of the court, spoke on her behalf.

Doyle said the woman should not be painted with the "polygamist brush." He said she is less culpable because women in the church are taught to have "absolute obedience" to the male head of the household.

"It is now 13 years later. Mr. Jeffs is in jail for the rest of his life," said Doyle.

"She doesn't have a husband who's going to order her to do anything. There's no need for individual deterrence for Mrs. Blackmore."

James Oler, a former leader in the polygamous community of Bountiful, was acquitted of the same charge after the judge ruled there wasn't proof he crossed the border with a 15-year-old girl.

Wilson is asking British Columbia's Court of Appeal to overturn his acquittal or order a new trial.

It's time to address violence against women with disabilities

By Bonnie L. Brayton

Huffington Post Canada (29.11.2016) - <http://huff.to/2fL9Xxi> - November 25, the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, marks the beginning of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. December 10, International Human Rights Day, marks the end of this international campaign.

Violence against women is an on-going epidemic in our country. Data released last year by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics in a report on Criminal Victimization in Canada revealed that sexual assault remains the only crime in Canada for which there has been no decline in the last decade.

In fact, the Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women, concerned with "the shortage of statistics and information on violence faced by young women and girls in Canada," is currently doing a study on violence against young women and girls.

When I presented to the committee last week, I pointed out that there are still no resources to speak of for girls with disabilities facing violence, even though they experience violence at higher rates and more frequently than any other group of young women and girls in Canada. The rates of sexual, physical, verbal and systemic violence are at least three times higher for young women and girls with disabilities.

Early results from a DAWN Canada project shows strong evidence of enormous gaps in violence-prevention policy and program delivery for women and girls with disabilities.

Policies tend to be reactive if they exist at all. Legislation specific to disability (for example, the 10 year old Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) is not applied from a gendered perspective. And any policies that appear to have merit are generally just that -- well-written policies with no champions, no funding (read no programs, no services or none specifically for our needs), and consequently no results.

For example, although technology provides great opportunities for supporting women and girls with disabilities, it also represents another avenue through which girls with disabilities are vulnerable to cyber-bullying or exploitation. But once again there is no legislation or policy in place to protect them, despite the fact that the use of on-line communications dominates youth culture today.

The vulnerability of young women and girls with disabilities cannot be underestimated. Last year, CBC reported the story of a young woman with an intellectual disability who was sexually assaulted on a public bus in Winnipeg, while her support work sat two seats ahead of her, listening to music on her iPod.

If this is possible on a public bus, what can happen in private, unmonitored spaces? It is no wonder that our society has not yet dared to investigate the rate of childhood sexual abuse among girl children with disabilities. No doubt it would be alarmingly high.

Canada must do better. Girls with disabilities need support and encouragement to become the confident, resilient leaders they are capable of being. But this cannot happen until we as a society take collective responsibility for ensuring it does.

Further reading:

[The double-edged challenge for women with disabilities](#)
[Women with disabilities](#)