

Niqab, Culture, Immigration¹

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It is clear from the comments of many Muslim writers and from the dress of many Muslim women on the street that a Muslim woman does not have to hide her face because of Islam. It is a matter of certain Muslim cultures, but not of the Islamic faith. The criterion is extreme modesty but not a total facial hide.

Civil servants have the responsibility towards their employer and towards tax payers to ensure they know with whom they are dealing. Hiding one's face makes that impossible. Of course, theoretically it would be possible to create a finger print data base containing finger prints of all women who have officially declared their intention of wearing the niqab. However, to expect such civil servants to have access to such a data base at all times and places is impractical and unreasonable.

I, too, am an immigrant and have had to discard certain customs very dear to me. It was my parents' legitimate choice when they decided to immigrate with their children to another culture. I was brought up wearing wooden shoes even in school, but when I entered a Canadian primary school I was not allowed to wear those wooden shoes in the gym! Imagine my suffering due to being prevented from expressing my self-identity!

It is the same choice and decision every immigrant must make. If you cannot or will not make that concession, you should stay where you are comfortable and where you do not need to make such concessions. But believe me, if it is not that one, you will have to make other concessions, many of them, some trivial, some very serious and personal. That belongs to the essence of immigrating.

NOTE: This article is being published on this website on November 1, 2015, only a few weeks after a decisive Canadian election that overthrew Stephen Harper. Little did I realize that the niqab issue would become an important item during the campaign and that Harper's strong rejection of it would be one of the reasons for his downfall.

¹ November 1, 2015.