

It's hard to wrap my headscarf around Ostrich Syndrome

Ostriches will periodically poke their beaks into a shallow hole where their eggs are incubating to turn them so they're evenly heated. Most people, including Gad Saad, know that they don't actually bury their heads in the sand.

But "burying one's head in the sand" has become so much part of our (and other) languages that ostriches might forgive Saad's use of the term "Ostrich Syndrome" for those (the "ostrich brigade") who deny an obvious but disagreeable fact. That includes many of our leaders – and a lot of other people.

The hijab is a case in point. Quebec's secularism bill, Bill 21, which prevents public servants and those giving and receiving public services from wearing religious symbols, has been criticized as draconian, divisive and discriminatory. The new law doesn't forbid only the hijab, it also nixes crosses, turbans, and kippahs. But some argue it's really about the hijab. No hijab and the law would not have happened, they say.

I agree with those people. But unlike many of them, I don't think the hijab is just a symbol of religious devotion. While each individual woman may have her own individual reasons for wearing a hijab or face veil, the hijab as such is a political statement and the flagship of political Islam.

Those who criticize Bill 21 tend to be silent about the fact that Iran's famous Vida Mohaved, "the Girl of Enghelab Street," and some of her fellow rebels received prison sentences for doffing their hijabs, and that "uncovered" women in many Muslim countries face not only severe state punishment but physical attacks and even death from the devout. And let's not forget Aqsa Parvez, the Shafia sisters and their father's co-wife, and others – all honour-killed in Canada for being too western, including not wearing the hijab.

It would be great if critics of Bill 21 and the banning of face veils in Western countries were equally vocal about the right of women everywhere not to wear them. But they aren't.

I blame the Ostrich Syndrome.

—Madeline Weld

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