EUROPEAN MASTER'S DEGREE IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATISATION
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Disregarding Human Rights for a Veiled Threat?

Facing the Ban on Full Veils in France

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Abstract

The emergent debate in Europe around the wearing of full veils by Muslim women illustrates a social malaise within some European societies towards the growing visibility and influence of Islam. Full veils are indeed considered by many to be manifestations of fundamentalist ideologies in deep contradiction with liberal values and Western standards of normal social behaviours and gender equality.

After an extensive two-year public debate during which the French government controversially showed its determination to put an end to the use of the full veil in the country, France is currently adopting a law that would ban the concealment of the face in all public places. Considered by many as an excessive limitation of the rights and freedoms of the women wearing a full veil, this ban faces a high risk to be censored both by French jurisdictions and by the European Courts of Human rights.

This thesis discusses the evolution of the debate in France and the consequences of the adoption of a ban on the concealment of the face in public areas. It argues that despite the fact that the full veil might be perceived by some people as a negation of Western liberal and democratic principles, the desire to protect the French Republican values does not necessitate nor justify the adoption of a law that is in such opposition to human rights and that risks affecting the Muslim community living in France and abroad.

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Julien Bertrand
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