Faux Feminism: France's Veil Ban as Orientalism

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Abstract
In the early months of 2010, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy told Parliament that the burqa is "not welcome" in France, citing this as a step to defend France against extremists. Employing Edward Said's theoretical notion of "Orientalism" as means of discussing the "Other," I argue for a more critical look at France's role in limiting religious freedom and denying notions of female agency. More specifically, I urge a more diversified view of feminism and female identity outside of the Western paradigm. By viewing the veil as a rhetorically universal symbol of oppression, Western feminists and political figures are missing the opportunity to recognize the diversity of religious adherence and feminist agency that exist in a variety of forms, some of which are highlighted in this paper. While touting the ban's role in promoting gender equality, Sarkozy employs "faux feminism"--a specious appropriation of feminist sentiment to rationalize Orientalist aims. In effect, this approach reifies Muslim women as victims in need of Western "heroes" while promoting a unique form of sexist Islamophobia.

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