

Press Release

The Secular Illusion of Neutrality: How the Headscarf Ban for Community Enforcement Officers Confirms a Targeted Anti-Islam Agenda

A community enforcement officer (boa) who wears a headscarf is, according to this line of reasoning, not neutral and less professional than a boa without a headscarf. That is, in essence, what the VVD argues with its proposed legislation against visible religious expressions among community enforcement officers (boas). The law is presented as a matter of neutrality and trust in the government. However, those who look deeper see something different: a law that targets Islam in particular, and more specifically, the Muslim woman.

It is remarkable that this debate was reignited precisely during the coronavirus crisis. At that time, The Netherlands was struggling with an overwhelmed healthcare system, economic uncertainty, and enormous pressure on citizens and businesses. Amid all these urgent problems, the PVV nevertheless chose to devote its energy to imposing clothing regulations on a negligible number of Muslim women. The fact that this issue was prioritized at such a moment is not a minor detail, but a clear indication of an ongoing anti-Islam agenda. Today, this initiative is being further pursued by the VVD in an attempt to introduce a nationwide ban on boas wearing a headscarf.

This measure is not merely aimed at a piece of clothing worn by Muslim women, but at a visible expression of Islam. The core of the discussion therefore goes far beyond a uniform regulation. Behind such measures lies a broader ideological assumption of secularism: namely, the idea that the secular worldview represents the neutral and universal standard by which all religious beliefs must be judged. Although secularism presents itself as objective and neutral, it too represents a specific historically formed worldview with its own foundations, norms, values, and views regarding the role of religion in society.

Because secularism itself is a subjective conviction, it can never stand “neutrally” in relation to other worldviews. In order to conceal this inherent partiality, the state uses the concept of “neutrality” as a political weapon. Under the guise of a “neutral” government, every deviation from the secular norm is actively penalized. However, a “secular” public official without religious symbols does not have “no opinion”; that official equally represents a worldview — namely the secular belief that religion belongs behind closed doors. This means that the secular “dress code” is neither neutral nor objective, since it is connected to its own worldview.

It is often claimed that such bans contribute to so-called “women’s rights” and “emancipation”. The opposite is true. For the Muslim woman, Islam is a deeply held intellectual conviction and the source of her identity, dignity, and liberation. Oppression does not come from the religion, as people are led to believe, but from the secular system that forces her to choose between her religious obligation and her career.

First, Muslim women were excluded in this way from the police; now the same threatens to happen with boas. A government that claims to protect Muslim women from tyranny, while at the same time marginalizing, excluding, and imposing restrictions upon them, is the real problem.

The proposed headscarf ban for boas is therefore not a principled struggle for neutrality. It is part of a broader development in which the religious visibility of Muslim women is gradually being restricted, while this discriminatory limitation is presented as “protection”, “freedom”, and “progress”.

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