



LIFTING THE VEIL ON THE NIQAB 'DEBATE'

I'll first have to admit to being a man and hence arguably not qualified to express my views on the attire of women.

Having said that I'm married to a woman was given birth to by one and have a couple of daughters so that is somehow in qualifying me to throw my prayer hat in the ring. Taking into consideration the fact that we have had from politicians to feminists expressing their opinions on this issue so that forced my hand to say a few words and get a non-veiled view on the so-called 'debate'. Yes, expect some veiled puns!

Economic migration was the core reason for the arrival of Muslims on this land; but that said many have arrived and supported this great country of ours due to the freedoms it offers one to practice what they believe in. The freedom to be able to worship or not, the freedom to be able to wear a hat or not, the freedom to be charitable or not is the foundation philosophy of Britain. In fact, we as citizens support the availability of these same freedoms and their practice of individuals whose beliefs and actions we at best tolerate and at worst we disagree with. However, we support their freedom of belief, expression and practice. Many around the world, are envious of this ability to live how you want to live without the dictatorial involvement of state or public body. This freedom by no way is one which goes against universally accepted norms like justice, fairness and equality but one which is a manifestation of these very values.

Feminists and others will rightly argue against social pressures, which in other words are male-dominated social pressures, which dictate that a woman should show cleavage when delivering the news or at least look attractive; that she should wear high heels and behave in a certain way. As we find these repulsive then surely to dictate to a woman what she **can't** wear is equally as bad. We don't have to agree with the veil – in fact the debate isn't about that and it shouldn't be about that. As Dan Hodges of the Telegraph writes, 'We as a society are concerned that people are culturally discriminating against – indeed oppressing – women by insisting they wear specific forms of dress. That runs contrary to our values and heritage...in fact we're so alarmed that people are being prescriptive about what women can and can't wear, we've decided to prescribe what women can and can't wear.'

The debate surely is that 'should society dictate to a woman what she can and can't wear?'

So let's open the debate up and set up the correct parameters of debate and discussion and take the veil away from this debate. (Yes some veiled puns which appear every now and then!)

Birmingham Metropolitan College banned the use of the veil because it was considered a security risk – but what data and information was this based on? Was it all hypothetical scenarios? If it is a security risk why back down after some protests?

What percentage of College students wear the niqab? Is it at epidemic proportions?



Is there a gang of women wearing burkas creating a crime-wave across Britain?

Looking at it from another prospective do most criminals have tattoos? If so is that a security risk and so the next time a person with a tattoo was in the bank the security should react?

Would we tell a race of people what they could or couldn't wear?

Is carrying a kirpan (blade) under your clothes as practicing Sikhs do a security risk?

Is having a full-face beard which covers all the face except the top part of the cheeks and eyes a similar security risk?

Are we criminalising a group of people?

Is this really about the security risk which it is argued is a cause for proposed banning?

And if it is Benjamin Franklin's quote springs to mind, 'Those who surrender freedom for security will not have and nor do they deserve, either one.'

There seems to be a proposal here but it is thinly veiled and as a country which prides itself in offering freedoms for all walks of life in all the various forms they come in then this debate actually centres on the key fundamental of this country – freedom – and as British citizens if we don't stand against a prescribed dress code then we deserve its dire consequences.