



The law on the hijab is a pure capitalist law. It orders femininity to be exposed. In other words, having the female body circulate according to the market paradigm is obligatory. For teenagers, i.e. the teeming center of the entire subjective universe, the law bans any holding back.



HIJAB  
ALAIN BADIOU

cover art by princess hijab  
PÉTROLEUSE PRESS  
[petroleusepress.tumblr.com](http://petroleusepress.tumblr.com)

**29** I am well aware the Ideas one is ready to die for are usually not worth very much. Being convinced that all gods withdrew long ago, I am grieved whenever young men and young women tear their bodies apart in horrendous massacres under the funereal invocation of something that has not existed for a long time. I am also aware that those fearsome “martyrs” have been made into instruments by conspirators concerned little about whom they intend to slaughter. It will never be repeated enough how Bin Laden is a creature of the American services. I am not naïve enough to believe in the purity, nor in the greatness, nor even in any effectiveness whatsoever of these suicide slaughters.

**30** But I say that this atrocious price is first of all paid by the meticulous destruction of all forms of political rationality by the dominators of the West. This undertaking has only come about through the abundance of intellectual and popular complicity, notably in France. You wanted to fiercely liquidate the Idea of revolution as far as into its memory? You wanted to uproot all usage, even allegorical ones, of the word “worker”? Don’t complain about the result. Clench your teeth and kill the poor. Or have them be killed by your American friends.

**31** We get the wars we deserve. In this world that is numbed with fear, the big gangsters mercilessly bomb countries drained of blood. Medium gangsters practice targeted assassinations of those who bother them. It’s the really small crooks who draft laws against hijab.

**32** They’ll say it’s less serious. To be sure. It’s less serious. Before the late Tribunal of History, we’ll obtain extenuating circumstances: “As a specialist in hairdressing styles, he only played a small role in the scandal.”

**1** A few likeable Republican women and men once put forward the idea that a bill banning scarves from the hair of schoolgirls had to be drafted. First, ban the scarf from school. Then, ban it from elsewhere and everywhere if possible. Did I hear “a law”? A Law! The President of the Republic was as limited a politician as he was unsinkable. Totalitarianly elected by 82 percent of voters, including all of the Socialists, i.e. those from whom a good number of the likeable Republican women and men used to be recruited, Chirac nodded his assent: a law, yes, a Law against a few thousand young girls who put the aforementioned scarf over their hair. Those hairless, mangy things! Muslims, moreover! This is how, once again, likewise to the surrender in Sedan, Pétain, the Algerian War, Mitterrand’s deceits and the villainous laws against workers without working papers, France has astonished the world. After the tragedies, the farce.

**2** Indeed, France has finally found a problem worthy of itself: the scarf draping the heads of a few girls. Decadence can be said to have been stopped in this country. The Muslim invasion, long diagnosed by Le Pen and confirmed nowadays by a slew of indubitable intellectuals, has found its interlocutor. The battle of Poitiers was kid’s stuff, Charles Martel, only a hired gun. But Chirac, the Socialists, feminists and Enlightenment intellectuals suffering from Islamophobia will win the battle of the headscarf. From Poitiers to the hijab, the consequence is right and progress considerable.

**3** Grandiose causes need new-style arguments. For example: hijab must be banned; it is a sign of male power (the father or eldest brother) over young girls or women. So, we’ll banish the women who obstinately wear it. Basically put: these girls or women are oppressed. Hence, they shall be punished. It’s a little like saying: “This woman has been raped: throw her in jail.” The hijab is so important that it deserves a logical system with renewed axioms.

**4** Or, contrariwise: it is they who freely want to wear that damned headscarf, those rebels, those brats! Hence, they shall be punished. Wait a minute: do you mean it isn’t the symbol of male oppression, after all? The father and eldest brother have nothing to do with it?

Where then does the need to ban the scarf come from? The problem in hijab is conspicuously religious. Those brats have made their belief conspicuous. You there! Go stand in the corner!

**5** Either it's the father and eldest brother, and "feministly" the hijab must be torn off, or it's the girl herself standing by her belief, and "laically" it must be torn off. There is no good headscarf. Bareheaded! Everywhere! As it used to be said—even non-Muslims said it—everyone must go out "bareheaded."

**6** Notice well how the hijab girl's father and eldest brother are not your mere parental associates. It has often been insinuated, sometimes even declared, that the father is an idiotic worker, a loser "right out from the country" and working the assembly line at Renault. An archaic guy, but stupid. The eldest brother deals hash. A modern guy, but corrupt. Sinister suburbs. Dangerous classes.

**7** The Muslim religion adds the following very serious taint to other religions: in France, it is the religion of the poor.

**8** Picture a secondary school principal, followed at a few centimeters' length by a squad of inspectors armed with scissors and books on jurisprudence: at the school gate they're going to check whether the hijabs, kippas and other hats are "conspicuous." That hijab, as big as a postage stamp perched upon a chignon? That kippa the size of a two-Euro coin? Fishy, very fishy. The tiny may well be the conspicuous version of the huge. Wait a minute, what do I see? Watch out! It's a top hat! Well now! When once questioned about top hats, Mallarmé said it all: "Whoever put such a thing on cannot remove it. The world would end, but not the hat." Conspicuous of eternity.

**9** Secularism. A rust-proof principle! Three or four decades ago, high schools forbade the sexes from mixing in a single classroom. Pants weren't allowed for girls. Catechism and chaplaincy were compulsory. Communion was solemn, with the guys in white armbands and the cutie pies under tulle veils. A real veil, not a headscarf. And you'd like me to hold that hijab as a crime? That symbol of a lag, of unrest, of a temporal intertwining? Ought these young ladies who

takes a lot of abnegation to do so. And it could very well turn out that Chirac the Soviet's Law ends up noisily banishing some excellent students.

**26** "To enjoy with no hindrances." That stupid motto from 1968 never ran the motor of knowledge at high speed. A certain dose of voluntary asceticism, the deeper reason for which has been known ever since Freud, is not foreign to the land of teaching. From it at least a few rough fragments of effective truths have emerged. So much so, that a headscarf may end up being useful. When patriotism, that hard alcohol of apprenticeship, is entirely lacking, every kind of idealism, even the cheap kind, is welcome—at least for those assuming that the object of schooling has little to do with "training" consumer-citizens.

**27** In truth of fact, the Scarfed Law expresses one thing and thing alone: fear. Westerners in general, the French in particular, are but a shivering, fearful lot. What are they afraid of? Barbarians, as usual. Those from within, i.e. the "young suburbanites"; those from without, i.e. "Islamist terrorists." Why are they frightened? Because they are guilty, but claim to be innocent. They are guilty of having renounced and attempted to annihilate—ever since the 1980s—every kind of emancipatory politics, every revolutionary form of Reason, and every true assertion of something else. Guilty of clutching at their lousy privileges. Guilty of being but old children playing with their manifold purchases. Yes, indeed, "in a long childhood, they have been made to age." They are thus afraid of everything a little less aged. A stubborn young lady, for instance.

**28** But especially, Westerners in general and the French in particular are afraid of death. They are no longer able to imagine how an Idea might be something for which risks are worth taking. "Zero death" is their most important desire. They see millions of people around the world who, for their part, have no reason to be afraid of death. And among them, many die in the name of an Idea almost daily. For the "civilized" this is the source of a most intimate sense of terror.

**22** As for the fact of human animals grouping together according to their origins, this is a natural and inevitable consequence of what are most often the miserable conditions immigrants face when arriving in France. Only the cousin or the fellow village countryman can, *volens nolens*, greet you at the St. Ouen l'Aumone home. One would really be obtuse to have to formally stress the point that the Chinese go to where the Chinese already are.

**23** The only problem regarding these “cultural differences” and “communities” is certainly not their social existence, habitat, work, family or school. It is that their names are vain when what is in question is a truth, whether it be of art, science, love or, especially, politics. That my life as a human animal is wrought with particularities is the law of things. That the categories of this particularity profess to be universal, thereby taking upon themselves the seriousness of the Subject, that’s when things regularly get disastrous. What matters is the separation of predicates. I can do mathematics in yellow underwear, or I can have a Rasta’s dreadlocks and work as an activist for policies subtracted from electoral “democracy.” The theorem isn’t any more yellow (or not-yellow), than is the slogan under which we gather made of dreads. Nor for that matter does the slogan consist of an absence of dreadlocks.

**24** It is said that schooling is gravely threatened by as insignificant a particularity as a few girls’ hijabs. This very feeling casts suspicion over the belief that truth has anything to do with what is being played out here. Instead, we find opinions, base and conservative opinions at that. Weren’t politicians and intellectuals seen to be asserting that schooling exists first and foremost to “train citizens”? What a gloomy program. In our times, the “citizen” is a little bitter-sensualist clutching at a political system—any semblance of which to truth is simply foreclosed.

**25** Shouldn’t we be preoccupied in both high and low places that the number of girls of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian origin, with their chignon tightly wound, an austere look on their faces, and doggedly at work, make up with a few Chinese, who are no less bound to the family universe, formidable class brains? Nowadays, it

pleasantly blend yesterday and today to really be excluded? Go on, let the capitalist grinder turn. Irrespective of the comings and goings, the repenting or the worker arrivals from afar, capitalism will figure out how to substitute the fat Moloch of merchandise for the dead gods of religions.

**10** While we’re on the subject, isn’t business the real mass religion? Compared to which Muslims look like an ascetic minority? Isn’t the conspicuous symbol of this degrading religion what we can read on pants, sneakers and t-shirts: Nike, Chevignon, Lacoste... Isn’t it cheaper yet to be a fashion victim at school than God’s faithful servant? If I were to aim at hitting a bull’s eye here—aiming big—I’d say everyone knows what’s needed: a law against brand names. Get to work, Chirac. Let’s ban the conspicuous symbols of Capital, with no compromises.

**11** Clear something up for me, please. What exactly characterizes Republican and feminist rationality on what is to be shown of the body in different spaces and at different times, and on what is not? As far as I understand, nowadays still, and not only at school, neither nipples are shown, nor pubic hair, nor the male member. Do I have to get angry that these parts are “withdrawn from the sight of others”? Must I suspect husbands, lovers and eldest brothers? Not that long ago in our own countryside—and still to this day in Sicily as elsewhere—widows wore black scarves, dark stockings and mantillas. You don’t have to be an Islamic terrorist’s widow to do so.

**12** Strange is the rage reserved by so many feminist ladies for the few girls wearing the hijab. They have begged poor president Chirac, the Soviet at 82 percent, to crack down on them in the name of the Law. Meanwhile the prostituted female body is everywhere. The most humiliating pornography is universally sold. Advice on sexually exposing bodies lavishes teen magazines day in and day out.

**13** A single explanation: a girl must show what she’s got to sell. She’s got to show her goods. She’s got to indicate that, henceforth, the circulation of women abides by the generalized model, and not by restricted exchange. Too bad for bearded fathers and elder

brothers! Long live the planetary market! The generalized model is the top fashion model.

**14** It used to be taken for granted that an intangible female right is to only have to get undressed in front of the person of her choosing. But no. It is vital to hint at undressing at every instant. Whoever covers up what she puts on the market is not a loyal merchant.

**15** Let's argue the following, then, a pretty strange point: the law on the hijab is a pure capitalist law. It orders femininity to be exposed. In other words, having the female body circulate according to the market paradigm is obligatory. For teenagers, i.e. the teeming center of the entire subjective universe, the law bans any holding back.

**16** It is said virtually everywhere that the “veil” is an intolerable symbol of control over female sexuality. Do you really believe female sexuality to not be controlled in our society these days? This naiveté would have made Foucault laugh. Never has so much care been given to female sexuality, so much attention to detail, so much informed advice, so much distinguishing between its good and bad uses. Enjoyment has become a sinister obligation. The universal exposure of supposedly exciting parts is a duty more rigid than Kant's moral imperative. In passing, between our tabloids’ “Enjoy it, women!” and our great-grandmothers' dictate “Don't enjoy it!” Lacan long ago established an isomorphism. Commercial control is more constant, more certain, more massive than patriarchal control could ever be. Generalized prostitutional circulation is faster and more reliable than the hardships of family incarcerations, the turnabouts of which kept audiences laughing for centuries from Ancient Greek comedy to Molière.

**17** The mother and the whore. In some countries, reactionary laws are drafted in favor of the mother and against the whore. In other countries, progressive laws are drafted in favor of the whore and against the mother. Yet it's the alternative between the two which must be rejected.

**18** Not however by the “neither... nor...”, which only perpetuates on neutral ground (i.e. at the center, like with François Bayrou?) what it professes to contest. “Neither mother, nor whore,”

that's quite pathetic. As is “neither whore nor submissive,” which is simply absurd: isn't a “whore” generally submissive, and oh so much? In France in the past, they used to be called “les respectueuses” (the respected). Public submissives, all in all. As for “subs” themselves, perhaps they are only private whores.

**19** There's no getting around it: thought's enemy nowadays is property, business, things such as souls, but not faith. What should be said instead is that [political] faith is what lacks the most. The “rise of religious fundamentalism” is but a mirror through which sated Westerners consider the frightful effects of the devastation of minds over which they have presided. And especially of the ruining of political thought, which Westerners have attempted to organize everywhere, either under cover of insignificant democracies or with the sizable back-up of humanitarian paratroopers. Under such conditions, secularism, professing to be at the service of different forms of knowledge, is but a scholarly rule by which to respect the competition, train according to “Western” norms and be hostile to every conviction. This is a schooling system for consumer cool, soft business, free ownership and disillusioned voters.

**20** One will never go into raptures enough over feminism's singular progression. Starting off with women's liberation, nowadays feminism avers that the “freedom” acquired is so obligatory that it requires girls (and not a single boy!) to be excluded owing to the sole fact of their dressing accoutrements.

**21** All of the society jargon about “communities,” and the as metaphysical as furious combat pitting “the Republic” against “communitarianisms,” all of that is utter nonsense. Let people live the way they want to, or can, eat what they are used to eating, wear turbans, dresses, hijabs, miniskirts or tap-dancing shoes, to bow low at any time [...] to take low-brow pictures of each other or speak in colorful jargons. These kinds of “differences” do not have the slightest universal scope. They neither hinder thought, nor uphold it. Nor is there a reason to either respect or vilipend them. That the “Other” lives a little bit differently—as admirers of discreet theology and portable morality are wont to say after Lévinas—is so obvious an observation as to be meaningless.