

Ban Face Masks: Our Safety Requires It

By Phyllis Chesler

For the first time since a ban against face masks became law in New York State's Nassau County, a man was arrested for appearing masked in public. Weslin Omar Ramirez Castillo, an illegal migrant from Guatemala, was dressed in all black and was wearing a ski mask in hot August weather. He was not a protestor but he was found to be carrying a 14 inch knife.



Various interest groups are already up in arms. They fear that this first-of-a-kind ban will be selectively enforced, mainly against people of color, against illegal migrants, against pro-Palestine activists, and against disabled individuals who are afraid of contracting Covid. Bizarrely, face-masking is also seen as a form of free speech.

For such reasons, those in charge of American universities cannot seem to find a way to ban face masks. Such face coverings, which obscure one's identity, are worn by criminals, burglars, terrorists, kidnappers, and by those students and outside activists who want all the privileges of "free speech," but only for themselves. Their "speech" often includes property damage, harassment, and civil unrest but

they do not want to be held accountable for either their views or their crimes. Thus, they hide behind masks, in cowardly anonymity. **(READ MORE from Phyllis Chesler: [The Stakes for Women in This Election Are Enormous](#))**

Since 10/7, the most aggressive anti-American, anti-Israel, pro-Palestine/pro-Hamas activists have shut down campuses, vandalized campus property, terrorized Jewish and other students, stopped traffic, and harassed civilians while disguised, wearing keffiyehs around their necks or on their faces. Some young, non-Muslim white women, also wore the a hijab (head covering), and sometimes a niqab (Islamic face coverings), to support Palestine/Hamas.

For a long time, I have viewed the burqa (full body covering), niqab, and sometimes even hijab, as a violation of women's rights as well as a health and security hazard. The burqa is a sensory deprivation isolation chamber, a moveable prison, a garment that removes women from society. The niqab also makes identification difficult and makes it impossible for a woman to dine in public with male colleagues who are non-family members.

Moroccan feminist, Fatima Mernissi, and Tunisian feminist, Samia Labidi, both viewed hijab as an incendiary political symbol, denoting oppressive patriarchal control, not as a legal, religious obligation. It is a forced, not a free choice.

There is a lively debate among Muslim feminists about this issue in terms of whether the state, especially a non-Muslim state, has the right to tell women how to dress or whether such rights belong to the family, the mosque, or to the woman alone. Some view the hijab and the niqab as a form of "resistance" to Western ways and believe that veiled women are more liberated than those who wear bikinis.

Many American student activists seem to agree with this line

of reasoning.

But here's something else to consider for all those who view face masking as a Muslim religious right.

Historically other countries, including Muslim countries, have not hesitated to ban the hijab, the niqab, the burqa, and the chador (an open cloak).

During the 1920s and 1930s, Kings, Shahs, and Presidents unveiled their female citizens and Muslim feminists campaigned for open faces in public. They were successful in Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran to name but a few countries. (READ MORE: [Why Are Women in America Cheering for Hamas and Iran?](#))

My favorite tale took place in [Afghanistan](#), when Shah Amanullah Khan (1919-1929) scandalized the populace by permitting his wife to go unveiled. By 1928, he urged Afghan women to uncover their faces and advocated the shooting of interfering husbands. He said that he himself would supply the weapons and promised that no inquiries would be instituted against the women.

Once, when he saw a woman wearing a burqa in public, he tore it off and burned it. Alas, poor Amanullah was exiled and the country plunged back into the past – at least until the 1960s when some modernization took place in the cities until the death-eating Taliban arose.

In 1926 in [Iran](#), Reza Shah provided police protection for Iranian women who chose to dispense with the traditional scarf. Within a decade, he ordered all teachers and wives of ministers, and high military officials to wear European clothes and hats rather than chadors.

Nearly a century later, in 2007 and 2009, the President of Tajikistan, a Muslim-majority country, banned the hijab. Why? According to a Tajikistani-American friend, this was done to

stop the Arab Sunni radicalization of the country, to safeguard national cultural values, combat superstition and extremism, and to return the country to Tajikistan's indigenous culture. The Tajikistani President-for-Life was alarmed by the spread of Arab Sunni Muslim imperialism and the accompanying terrorism.

The chattering classes and the legal gliterrati in America say that banning is a very complex issue. What if one wears a face mask for religious reasons? (That custom applies only to women though – why are the male activists dressing like women?)

Support for laws to ban Ku Klux Klan-like face and head coverings have gained support in both New York and California. There is a Black-Jewish coalition in favor of banning masks at protests. Hazel Dukes, President of the NAACP New York State Conference, said: "Black communities know all too well that individuals who hide their identities with intent to terrorize, intimidate, or harass are a threat to all our safety and have no place in New York."

The Foundation for Individual Rights views the First Amendment as Protecting the right to speak anonymously, "shielding individuals from retaliation for expressing dissenting or unpopular ideas."

Support for Palestine is not dissent, as this view seems to be popular globally and on campuses. The issue here is not free speech; it is vandalism and intimidation, harassment, and violence against Jewish/Zionist students, professors, and others. It is incitement based on lethal lies that always leads to violence, Brownshirt behavior that should no longer be coddled.

Even France and Belgium, two countries often appropriately deemed solicitous of Islamic extremism, banned the burqa and the niqab long ago. Every state in the union should pass religion-neutral bans on face masks.

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