



Module 7: Body Politics:

Module 7a: Hijab 101 (*powerpoint*)

Module 7b: Multiple Meanings & Images
of the Hijab (*powerpoint*)

Module 7c: Belonging & Banishment –
Quebec's Bill 94 (*powerpoint*)

Module 7d: Educator's Guide to
Module 7c

| Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21st Century

body politics: belonging and banishment – Quebec’s bill 94

educator’s guide to 7c

INTRODUCTION

This module provides supplementary information for educators for the presentation in Module 7c. It also includes some additional discussion questions.

slide 2: niqab

The niqab differs from the hijab. The niqab is a piece of cloth that covers a woman’s face, with the exception of the eyes. The hijab is a head covering that most often covers a woman’s hair and neck. The number of niqab-wearing women is quite low as it is not a common practice among Muslim women.

slide 3: bill 94

The legislation would negatively affect the small number of niqab wearing-women in the province of Quebec. These women would not be able to receive any governmental services, including health care, if they refused to uncover their faces. Moreover, the government’s intention to better integrate citizens would be challenged by such legislation according to opponents of Bill 94, who also add that such laws would further marginalize these Muslim women.

slide 4: premier Charest's response

The proposed legislation had come after lengthy debates on Quebec identity and nationhood. During the press conference in which Premier Charest outlined the bill, he was accompanied by female members of his caucus as a sign of support from the women of his party (see picture in link provided). On the federal level, the government remained quiet and did not wish to intervene in any direct way.

slide 5: controversy in a french language class

In her original interviews, Naema wished only to be named by her given name. She described her situation as discriminatory because she had had no problem before immigration officials visited her school 6 months after she began. She described her instructor as very helpful in accommodating her religious practice, even allowing her to sit at the front of the class so that the male students were behind her and could not see her face. According to the school's administrator, the accommodation caused tension in the classroom and had to be dealt with. After the school made the decision, the Quebec government spoke out in support of it and ensured that it would be more vigilant with avoiding such situations in the future.

slide 6–7: reasonable accommodation

The Bouchard-Taylor Report came out of the commission struck by the Quebec government to address the issue of accommodation of minorities in public institutions. This included questions of prayer space, public symbols of religiosity, and the extent to which the state should make accommodations for those who sought them.

slides 8–9: responses to bill 94

Major organizations that had been involved and made statements against Bill 94 included the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW), Canadian Council of Islamic-American Relations (CAIR-CAN), Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC), and Tessalate Institute. Other organizations that were involved were more ad hoc in their nature, operating as issue-based collective-action groups that often operated as umbrella organizations. As well as the “Non-No to Bill 94 coalition” that openly protested and critiqued the proposed legislation, another group known as the KW Coalition of Concerned Muslim Women came into being very quickly. The successful event held by the latter group brought together Muslims and non-Muslims in the spirit of understanding and educating.

Before the eruption of this debate, the MCC had written an open letter to Ottawa, urging the federal government to ban the niqab. The government argued that they would not intervene in a matter of religious expression such as this one at the time. However, when Bill 94 debates began, the federal government remained quiet.

slide 10: the media on bill 94

The media presented extensive coverage of Bill 94, and hosted a number of debates between activists, scholars, members of the Muslim community, and members at large. Criticism of the coverage was largely related to the polemicized approach taken when tackling the issue. The complexities of the case were often lost, reducing the discussions to simple pro/anti positions.

slide 11–13: women asked to remove her niqab while testifying

These slides provide information on a court case regarding a women testifying while wearing the niqab.

slide 14: references

slide 15: freedoms of conscience and religious expression in canada

In the responses to Bill 94, many opponents took the position that the proposed legislation challenged the niqab-wearing women's rights to express their religious identity through dress, and also challenged their right to freely practise their belief. The issue of fundamental freedoms provided a common point of solidarity for many groups, including human rights groups, women's groups, religious organizations, and average people who felt strongly about protecting inalienable rights of those living in Canada.

slide 16: previous veiling controversy

Asmahan's case sparked debates on freedom of expression as a fundamental right. Moreover, it brought to light the ongoing discussions on Quebec identity and nationhood. The hijab, as a floating signifier, became a symbol of political resistance that did not fit on soccer fields. In interviews that followed this case, Asmahan still says she has love for the game, just not the politics that have come with it. She continues to play but only in places that are safe and accepting of her choice to wear her hijab.

slides 17–18: niqab debates in the world

The photo of the girl using the French flag as both her hijab and niqab (slide 17) is a photo that can be discussed in the context of Bill 94. The message sent to niqab-wearing women by the Quebec government was that the niqab challenged integration in the province and did not fit in Quebecois society. The photo demonstrates similar debates that happened in France, where both the hijab and niqab are banned (the hijab is banned in public institutions only). The photo tries to extend the definition of those who fit in the "nation" by demonstrating that patriotism is not limited only to those who look and dress "French." This is also an example of where the hijab and niqab are used as political symbols of resistance against government.

slide 19: media coverage of veiling controversies around the world

[list of web addresses with stories about veiling bans and controversies]

Questions to Discuss:

What assumptions about the niqab and women does Bill 94 make?

What should the role of the state be in ensuring gender equality? Does Bill 94 ensure this right?

Does the niqab fit within the Canadian “nation”?

Questions to Assign:

After reading through the position papers of the various organizations responding to Bill 94, write a position piece in support of or in opposition to the legislation.