

Pas touche à mon hijab – Movement in France

The campaign #PasToucheAMonHijab (“Hands off my hijab”) emerged in response to political initiatives in France in 2022 that increasingly restricted the wearing of the hijab. In particular, the proposal to ban girls under 18 from wearing a headscarf in public sparked massive resistance. The movement was initiated largely by young Muslim women who refuse state control over their bodies. The campaign uses social media, visual protest, and creative self-representation to highlight what politics and mainstream media ignored: that this is a struggle over democratic rights, identity, and self-determination.

The images and posts of the campaign show hijab-wearing women in everyday situations—laughing, studying, working, fully participating in public life. These images directly counter the stereotype that the hijab is merely a symbol of oppression. The hashtag quickly spread and helped Muslim women reclaim their voices after years in which others spoke about them rather than with them. Protests took place not only online but also in schools, universities, workplaces, sports, and in the streets—everywhere these laws were to be enforced. Not all feminists supported the movement; many prominent, especially white and French feminist figures even endorsed the ban. One example is Élisabeth Badinter, one of France’s most renowned feminist philosophers: for her, “Islamic feminism” does not exist—it is, she argues, a contradiction in terms.

That this is not true can be read in the article *“Islamische und muslimische Feminismen in Deutschland”* by Hilistina Banze.

Such positions—like Badinter’s—are examples of “colonial feminism.” This is when feminist arguments are used to justify violent interventions into the lives of colonized or marginalized groups. The claim is that women need to be “saved,” but in reality, such interventions legitimize new forms of domination. This kind of feminism serves the interests of ruling elites, who benefit from social division and the marginalization of oppressed groups. It is understandable that many racialized, migrant, and working-class women do not identify with this form of feminism. Through many crucial contributions, they have exposed this betrayal of women’s liberation. (Books & text recommendations)

The hijab has long been portrayed in the West as a symbol of backwardness. This narrative does not arise from any objective or “universal” truth, but from colonial frameworks of interpretation. No piece of clothing has a fixed meaning. It can signify, for example:

- spirituality
- cultural identity
- belonging
- privacy
- resistance against racism
- protection from commercial beauty norms
- political self-assertion
- family tradition

- personal aesthetics

The old colonial logic reappears in modern hijab bans. Politicians often justify interventions in the religious freedom of Muslim—and also Romani—women with supposed feminist motives: they claim to “protect,” “integrate,” or “empower” women. Many affected women rightly reject this. Under the pretext of protecting women from patriarchal structures, new patriarchal structures are imposed—this time by the state itself. Women’s autonomy is not expanded but restricted, and rights are diminished. Such bans are therefore a step backward from both a democratic and a feminist perspective.

The concrete result of these policies is that women and girls are excluded from schools, sports, and workplaces if they refuse to comply. Headscarf bans thus force women to abandon their religious and cultural practices in order to gain social belonging. What is promoted is not neutrality, but assimilation under pressure—or racist exclusion.

It is crucial to understand that many women who wear a hijab in Europe do not experience religion as the primary source of restriction, but rather social inequality, racism, and state discrimination.

The campaign #PasToucheAMonHijab seeks to show that true equality can only exist when women—in all their diversity—are seen, heard, and respected. But under what conditions is this possible?

For genuine liberation of women, the dismantling of capitalist and imperialist systems of exploitation and oppression is necessary. Only then will there be no structural interest in setting genders and nations against one another. On the path toward that goal, defending democratic rights and building collective experience in feminist struggle are essential.

If you live in Tyrol, the Frauen*vernetzung Tirol may be of interest to you. Migrant and anti-imperialist groups are also part of **this alliance**