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How free are women who only see their city through a letterbox slit? CREDIT: ALAMY

By **Allison Pearson**

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My lecturer friend was shocked when a student asked if she could miss class to accompany her mum to hospital. The daughter needed to translate for the mother who had lived in east London for more than 30 years. When my friend wondered how that was possible, the daughter replied: “My dad didn’t want mum to learn English so she never did.”

Sadly, her case is far from unique. Some 22 per cent of Muslim women in the UK – around 190,000 – speak little or no English. That’s not a huge figure in itself, but multiply it by the number of their children and suddenly you have an awful lot of five-year-olds turning up at school without a clue how to talk to their teachers or classmates. Without a clue about the culture of their country.

"No one is ever going to convince me that shrouding a woman's body and face says anything other than Subjugated Female Within"

Shaista Gohir, chair of the Muslim Women’s Network UK, says women tell her that their husbands or in-laws don’t want them to learn English because it will “disturb the status quo”. So you live in the UK, where you get all the benefits of the world’s fifth largest economy, but you can still treat your wives

and daughters as if you were back in rural Pakistan. Result! You can ensure that women are confined mainly to the home while the men go out and speak for your community.

Sometimes, there are segregated meetings where men get the chairs and women sit in the corridor. If girls attend an Islamic school, they are covered in black from head to toe from a young age. No one outside their community wants to talk to them because they look scary – and this, too, suits your purposes. They never get access to the opportunities enjoyed by other British young women. Good. Who knows what ideas *that* might give them...



The most senior judge in England and Wales said he recognised the wearing of the niqab - the Muslim garment which leaves only a woman's eyes visible - was "divisive" CREDIT: ALAMY

Oh, and if you want to divorce your wife, you use a Sharia court where women are seen as having half the worth of men. So much nicer than British justice with its crazy insistence on equality!

Well, if Muslim men think like that, then they deserve to have their “status quo” disturbed. That is why we should give a cautious welcome to David Cameron’s £20 million plan to improve English classes for immigrants and, more specifically, to bring Muslim women into mainstream society. I say cautious because any plan which threatens to deport women for failing to learn English when it’s the men who are keeping them locked away is grossly unfair. Muslim women have got

quite enough outrageous sexism to deal with as it is.

Three cheers, though, for the Prime Minister's proposed ban on women wearing veils in schools, courts and other British institutions. The niqab is just horrible. How can children learn from a teacher who can't be seen, or jurors assess a hidden woman's evidence? And I'm sorry, but no one is ever going to convince me that shrouding a woman's body and face says anything other than Subjugated Female Within.

"Multiculturalism leads to parallel societies and therefore remains a 'life lie', or a sham"

Angela Merkel

At last, our PM has had the balls to confront the "appalling practices" of a patriarchal culture which has seen discrimination against women and girls flourish. Of course, the PC mob are still in denial. Andy Burnham, the Shadow Home Secretary, tweeted:

"Cameron's simplistic, headline-driven approach to extremism risks unfairly stigmatising a whole community, thereby making the problem worse."

Let's pause for a moment and think what Burnham's party did. Apart from turning a blind eye to Pakistani girls "disappearing" from schools (into forced marriages) so Labour could hang on to their fathers' votes, it was Labour that spread the pernicious doctrine of multiculturalism, which says that all cultures are equal. What, even the ones that treat 14-year-old girls like brood mares?

Shush, madam. Don't go worrying your pretty little head about that; go indoors and do something with a mop, please.



Angela Merkel thinks multiculturalism leads to parallel societies

As Angela Merkel put it recently: “Multiculturalism leads to parallel societies and therefore remains a ‘life lie’, or a sham.” Back in the Eighties, I taught English to Bengali and Bangladeshi women and was moved by how hungry they were to learn. But multiculturalism, combined with their mens’ reluctance to grant them western freedoms, ensured that they ended up in ghettos. That mistake was to cost this country dear.

The UK is still spending £100 million a year on interpreters. One hospital trust in the North West uses interpreters 74 times *a day*. In the NHS, the sum spent on foreign-language services has risen by 41 per cent over the past four years to at least £33 million. That would buy a helping hand for the steelworkers of Port Talbot, wouldn’t it? Now there’s a vulnerable minority for you, but I’m afraid they’re white, working class and Welsh. Bad luck, boys.

By bending over backwards to adapt to immigrants, instead of the other way around, we put them at a terrible disadvantage. Naz Shah, Labour MP for Bradford West, admits that the poor standard of English among many women in her constituency is a “huge barrier to integration” and damages the educational prospects of their children. Some in the Pakistani community, Sha said, seemed to be going backwards. “When my parents came over, my mum had to learn the basics to get by. Now, with the third and fourth generations, it’s perfectly possible to live a life where you never have to speak English because everyone where you

live speaks your language.”

"Mothers can teach their sons better, but not if they don't have the words"

Incredibly, it is easier in 2016 for a Muslim to lead a life broadly untouched by English language and culture than it was 30 years ago. And that really matters at a time when home-grown terrorism is such a threat. This week, yet more British Muslims (four students this time) were on trial for allegedly plotting drive-by shootings against police and soldiers. Such cases make a nonsense of Andy Burnham's claim that the Prime Minister's plan "stigmatises" Muslims.

Muslims are well and truly stigmatised already, I'm sorry to say, and the PM to his credit is making a bold attempt to tackle a toxic situation.

When Donald Trump, he of the multi-directional apricot hair, made his inflammatory remarks about banning Muslims from the US, a woman called Saba Ahmed turned up on TV to take him on. I was delighted. Here was a bright, funny Republican lady who just happened to be wearing a headscarf. Ahmed was obviously a patriotic American in every fibre of her being. In the States, they are lucky they can take such happy integration for granted.




Donald Trump has called for a ban on all Muslims entering the US

In the UK, men too often do the talking for Muslim women. That needs to stop. Let's ban segregated meetings from taking place in public buildings. Stop Sharia courts hearing matrimonial and family cases where women are treated as second-class citizens. Close down those single-sex faith schools in which girls are given a rotten education that equips them only to be silent handmaidens (and, no, you're not shutting CofE schools as well, because they're not misogynist like the Islamic schools).

Only women, I think, have the ability to reform Islam. Mothers can teach their sons better, but not if they don't have the words. It may take several generations, but learning English is a good start.



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