

## SECULARISM, ISLAMISM, AND THE ANTI-IMMIGRATION CONFUSION

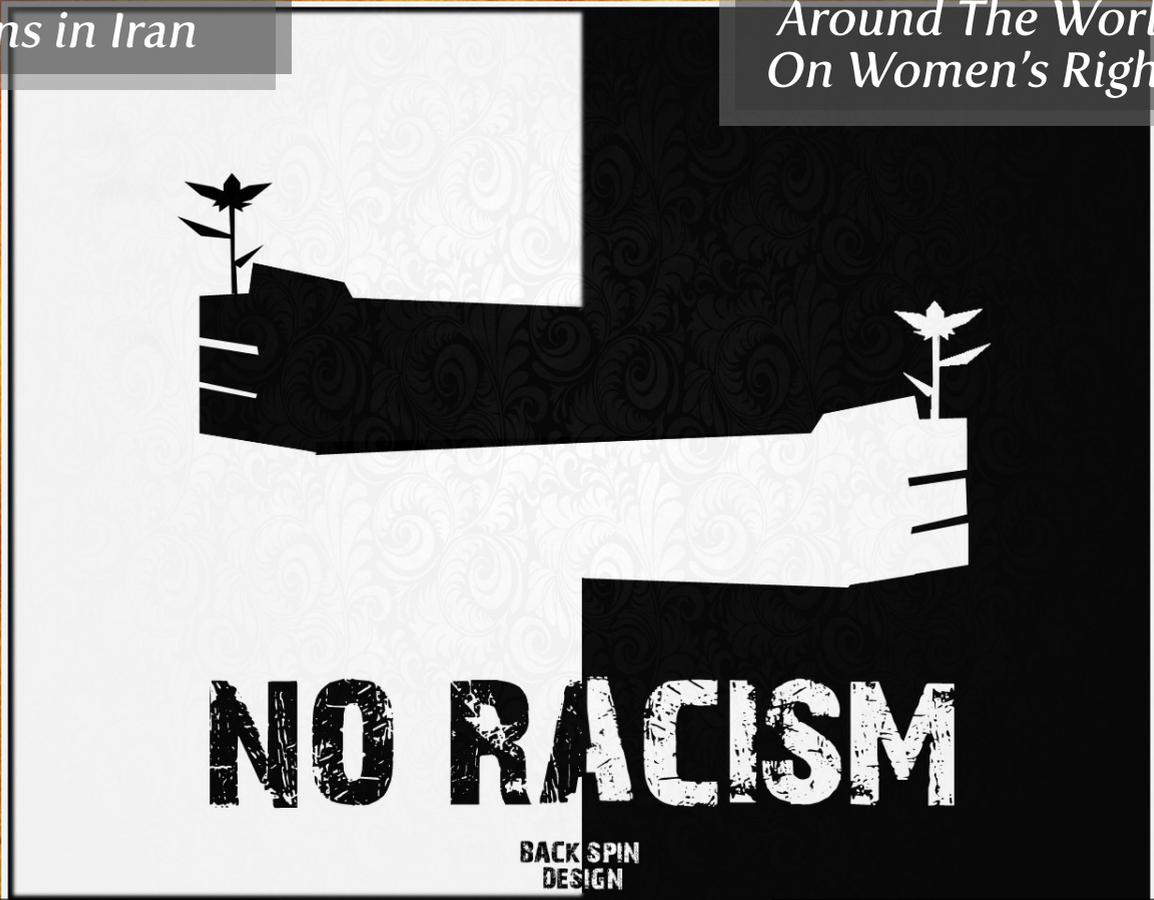
Interview with Kenan Malik

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# interviews

## SECULARISM, ISLAMISM, AND THE ANTI-IMMIGRATION CONFUSION

### Interview with Kenan Malik

**Maryam Namazie:** *Restrictions demanded by Islamists are viewed as the demand of Muslims and immigrants who are seen to be a homogeneous group with no differences of opinion. Immigrants and Muslims are often blamed for all of Britain and Europe's woes but particularly for the rise of Sharia courts, the burqa or 7/7. Your views?*

**Kenan Malik:** When I was working on my book *From Fatwa to Jihad*, I interviewed Naser Khader, a Danish MP and one of the best known Muslims in the country. He recalled a conversation he had had at the time of the Danish cartoon controversy with Toger Seidenfaden, editor of the left-wing newspaper *Politiken*. 'He said to me that the cartoons insulted all Muslims', Khader remembers. 'I said I was not insulted. And he said, "But you're not a real Muslim".'

That sums up the liberal attitude towards Muslims. You are only a 'proper' Muslim if you want to ban Danish cartoons, or are offended by *The Satanic Verses* or think that Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is demeaning to your community. Similarly, you are only a proper Sikh if you are offended by Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's play *Behzti*. Someone like Naser Khader, on the other hand, or like Salman Rushdie or Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, or Monica Ali, are seen as too liberal, too 'Westernized', too progressive, to be truly of their community.

The consequence has been that the most reactionary figures get to be seen as the authentic voices of those communities. And in presenting Muslim communities in this fashion, liberals do the racists' job for them. The protests against the cartoons, as Khader put it, 'were not about Mohammed. They were about who should represent Muslims'. And what was 'really offensive' to him was that 'journalists and politicians see the fundamentalists as the real Muslims'.

It's one of the ironies of the liberal multicultural view. Liberals argue for multicultural policies on the grounds that we live in a diverse nation. But they seem also to believe that such diversity somehow magically stops at the edges of minority communities.

They wash over differences and conflicts in those communities, seeing them instead as fixed, homogenous groups with a single set of views, primarily driven by faith. And they rely on so-called community leaders to be suitable judges of what is and is not acceptable or necessary for that community. As a result, progressive voices often get silenced as 'inauthentic' or as not really being of that community.



Photo via the Guardian.

**Maryam Namazie:** *Free expression is a demand of those without power vis-a-vis the powers that be. It seems more often than not, it is those with power and influence making such demands at the expense of those who need it most. I'm thinking of Islamists using rights language to deny rights and expression. Free speech and expression have often been censored under the guise of respecting the sensibilities of Islamists (couched in terms of Muslim or minority sensibilities).*

**Kenan Malik:** There is a strand of leftwing argument that insists on censorship as a necessary shield to protect the powerless, from the prejudices spewed by the media, for instance, or from hate speech. It is certainly necessary to combat prejudice and to confront hate speech. But censorship is no weapon through which to do so. The question to ask yourself is this: who benefits from censorship? The answer is those who have the need to censor and the power to do so. And they are not the powerless, but those who seek to protect their power.

Any kind of social change or social progress necessarily means offending some deeply held sensibilities. 'You can't say that!' is all too often the response of those in power to having their power challenged. To accept that certain things cannot be

said is to accept that certain forms of power cannot be challenged.

The notion of 'protecting sensibilities' suggests that certain beliefs are so important or valuable to certain people that they should be put beyond the possibility of being insulted, or caricatured or even questioned. The importance of the principle of free speech is precisely that it provides a permanent challenge to the idea that some questions are beyond contention, and hence acts as a permanent challenge to authority. This is why free speech is essential not simply to the practice of democracy, but also to the aspirations of those groups who may have been failed by the formal democratic processes; to those whose voices may have been silenced by racism, for instance. The real value of free speech, in other words, is not to those who possess power, but to those who want to challenge them. And the real value of censorship is to those who do not wish their authority to be challenged.

**Maryam Namazie:** *Those who scapegoat immigrants and Muslims say they bring with them "alien cultures that are incompatible with Britain or the west".*

**Kenan Malik:** Almost every wave of immigration has, at that time, been seen as the imposition of incompatible alien cultures. So, at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a great uproar about Jewish immigration to Britain, an uproar that led to Britain's first immigration controls in 1905. Without such a law, the Prime Minister Arthur Balfour claimed, 'though the Briton of the future may have the same laws, the same institutions and constitution', nevertheless 'nationality would not be the same and would not be the nationality we would desire to be our heirs through the ages yet to come'.

By the 1950s, the Jewish community had come to be seen as part of the British cultural landscape. The

same arguments used against Jews half a century earlier were now deployed against a new wave of immigrants from South Asia and the Caribbean. Margaret Thatcher gave a notorious TV interview in which she claimed that there were in Britain 'an awful lot' of black and Asian immigrants and that 'people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture'.

Just as Jews became an accepted part of the cultural landscape, so did post-war immigrants from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, though the acceptance was more grudging. Today, the same arguments that were once used against Jews, and then against South Asian and Caribbean immigrants, are now raised against Muslims and East Europeans.

What immigration often does is to crystallise existing social anxieties about identities and values. It is the uncertainty about identities and values that drive immigration panics and fuel the fear of the 'Other'. And that's the issue that needs tackling.

What the anti-immigration argument confuses is peoples and values. People of North African or South Asian parentage, critics of immigration claim, will inevitably cleave to a different set of values than those of European ancestry. But why should they? Being born to European parents is not a passport to Enlightenment beliefs. So why should we imagine that having Bangladeshi or Moroccan ancestry makes one automatically believe in sharia? Secularism and fundamentalism are not ideas stitched into people's DNA. They are, like all values, absorbed, accepted, rejected. A generation ago there were strong secular movements in Muslim communities and fundamentalism was a marginal force. Today secularism is much weaker, and Islamism much stronger. This shift has been propelled not by demographic changes but by political developments – the abandonment by the left of universalist values for particularist beliefs, the rise of identity politics, the

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imposition of multicultural policies, the collapse of broader social movements, and so on. And political developments can also help reverse the trend.

What has eroded in recent years is faith in the idea that it is possible to win peoples of different backgrounds to a common set of secular, humanist, enlightened values. That is the real problem: not immigration, or Muslim immigration, but the lack of conviction in a progressive, secular, humanist project. Our job, it seems to me, is to restore that conviction.

**Maryam Namazie:** *Criticism of religion has always been a cornerstone of progress in a society. Particularly today, there is an important need to criticise Islam and Islamic states and laws though here in the west it is perceived as Islamophobic and racist. It doesn't help that there are bigoted groups like the English Defence League that criticise Islam and Islamism in order to scapegoat Muslims and immigrants. Many remain silent so as not to be accused of racism. How does one take a principled position on this whilst defending free expression?*

**Kenan Malik:** We need to distinguish between three things: Islam, Islamism and Muslims. As a set of ideas, beliefs and values, Islam has to be as open to questioning and criticism as any other set of ideas, beliefs and values. Islamism, a politicized form of Islam, can often take highly bigoted forms, and needs always to be challenged. Similarly anti-Muslim bigotry needs to be confronted any time it asserts itself.

The challenge is to stand up to bigotry from whichever quarter such bigotry comes. To suggest that we should not criticize Islam or Islamism because racists also do so is a bit like suggesting that we should not criticize Israel because anti-Semites also do so. It is quite possible to distinguish between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. It is equally possible to distinguish between



Image credit: Kurt Löwenstein Educational Center International Team, Germany

criticism of Islam and Islamism, on the one hand, and anti-Muslim bigotry, on the other.

When it comes to criticizing ideas, nothing should be out of bounds. But if no criticism should be off limits, nevertheless some kinds of criticism need to be challenged. The other side of defending free speech is the necessity of confronting bigotry. The whole point of free speech is

to create the conditions for robust debate. And one reason for such robust debate is to be able to challenge obnoxious views. To argue for free speech but not to utilize it to challenge obnoxious, odious and hateful views seems to me immoral. It is, in other words, morally incumbent on those who argue for free speech to also stand up to racism and bigotry.

The line between criticism and bigotry is crossed when criticism of Islam, of ideas or beliefs, become transposed into prejudice about people; or when critics demand that Muslims are denied rights, or be discriminated against, simply because they happen to be Muslims. We should oppose all discrimination against Muslims in the public sphere, from discriminatory policing and immigration laws that might specifically target Muslims, to planning regulations that make it more difficult to build mosques than other similar buildings or restrictions on the ability of Muslims to assemble or worship that apply merely because they happen to be Muslims. Whatever one's beliefs, there should be complete freedom to express them, short of inciting violence. Whatever one's beliefs, there should be freedom to assemble to promote them. And whatever one's beliefs, there should be freedom to act upon those beliefs, so long as in so doing one neither physically harms another individual nor transgresses that individual's rights in the public sphere. A Muslim should have the same rights and obligations as any other citizen.

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It is not just the EDL that is the problem here. Many liberals, too, promote insidious arguments about Muslims that often fuel bigotry. Many have bought into the myth of the 'clash of civilizations'. Others, including people like Sam Harris and Martin Amis, figures who are often lauded by humanists and atheists, argue for discriminatory policies towards Muslims. Harris has even written that 'the people who speak most sensibly about the threat that Islam poses to Europe are actually fascists'. I am suggesting that they are not bigots in any reasonable sense of the word. But because their arguments often so lack nuance, and are so bereft of context, they both provide intellectual ammunition for bigots and can become a means of mainstreaming bigoted arguments.

**Maryam Namazie:** *Universities UK issued guidelines (now withdrawn) saying sex segregation at universities is permissible if "imposing an unsegregated seating area in addition to the segregated areas contravenes the genuinely-held religious beliefs of the group hosting the event, or those of the speaker, the institution should be mindful to ensure that the freedom of speech of the religious group or speaker is not curtailed unlawfully." This seems to be more about a hierarchy of rights rather than free speech or personal religious beliefs.*

**Kenan Malik:** It's a failure to understand what freedom of religion means. Religious freedom is not a special kind of liberty. It is, rather, one expression of a broader set of freedoms of conscience, belief, assembly and action.

As a society we should tolerate as far as is possible the desire of people to live according to their conscience. But that toleration must end when someone acting upon his or her conscience causes harm to another without consent, or infringes upon another's genuine rights in the public sphere.

In its internal affairs, religious institutions should be free to act in many ways that may be anathema to secular values. They should be free, for instance, to bar women from acting as clergy or to segregate the sexes in religious services or private meetings, however objectionable such policies or actions may seem. Enforced segregation in a public forum is, however, a different matter and should be vigorously opposed. In public settings, whether in buses or

# NO HUMAN BEING IS ILLEGAL

Human beings can be beautiful or more beautiful,  
they can be fat or skinny, they can be right or wrong, but illegal?  
How can a human being be illegal?

- Elie Wiesel



Image credit: "No Human Being Is Illegal" by Favianna Rodriguez

restaurants or universities, people have an expectation of, and a right to, equal treatment. No beliefs, whether religious or political, should be allowed to override such equality.

To insist on this is not, as many believers suggest, to enforce secular discrimination against religious belief. Racists, communists, Greens – many non-religious groups could claim that their beliefs enforce upon them certain actions or practices. It would be illegal, however, for a racist café owner to bar black people, or for Greens to destroy a farmer's field of legally grown GM crops, however deep-set their particular beliefs. There is a line, in other words, that cannot be crossed even if conscience requires one to. That line should be in the same place for religious believers as for non-believers.

Having said this, it is also important that we should not seek to ban groups, however odious their beliefs. The best way to tackle gender segregation in a public meeting is by 'desegregating' such meetings, by publicly challenging the seating arrangements, and sitting where we wish to. What we should not do is to provide greater leeway for university authorities to police meetings of whatever kind.

**Kenan Malik is a writer, lecturer, broadcaster and the author of "From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Aftermath".**

# newsflash

## GENERAL

A new social-attitudes [survey](#) of men and women in Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iraq and Pakistan has found small levels of support for the wearing of a full-face veil in much of the Middle East. On whether women should be able to choose their own clothing, 14 per cent agreed with this in Egypt, with 22 per cent in Pakistan and 27 per cent in Iraq. The idea won support from 47 per cent in Saudi Arabia, 49 per cent in Lebanon, 52 per cent in Turkey and 56 per cent in Tunisia. Professor Mansoor Moaddel, principal investigator in the report by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, said attitudes to women's dress were closely related to wider views on gender equality and social values. "All of the countries except Egypt are showing trends towards increased equality for women and a move towards political secularism", he said. "People from these countries have seen the extremism of Islamic governments or witnessed terrorism and political violence, and are taking the position that it's not something valuable for their countries".

## AFGHANISTAN

Violent crime against women in Afghanistan hit record levels and became increasingly brutal in 2013, the head of the country's human rights commission [said](#). The United Nations in December reported a 28 percent increase in cases of brutality against women for October 2012 through September 2013. Sima Samar, chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, told Reuters that the severity of

attacks on women had greatly intensified last year. "The brutality of the cases is really bad. Cutting the nose, lips and ears. Committing public rape". "Killing women in Afghanistan is an easy thing. There's no punishment" said Suraya Pakzad, who runs women's shelters in several provinces. She cited recent cases in which women had been publicly stoned as Afghan troops looked on. "Laws are improved, but implementation of those laws are in the hands of warlords... I think we are going backwards". Another sign that rights for women have been rolled back in recent years is a rise in cases of self-immolation, a desperate last resort for women in abusive situations. The burns unit of Herat hospital, one of two in Afghanistan, admitted a record number of women who had attempted to set themselves on fire in 2012.

## EGYPT

Egyptian voters have [approved](#) a new constitution which grants women equal rights and extends protections for the persecuted Coptic Christian community. The Muslim Brotherhood had called for a boycott of the referendum; turnout was variously estimated at 40%-55%.

A human rights defender Magda Adly [said](#) that as far as the situation of women is concerned, she has seen "no change. We still do not have a law that criminalizes violence against women in the family. And sexual violence is increasing". For example, some "186 cases of sexual assault and rape were documented in Tahrir Square" during the protests between June 28 and July 7, 2013, she noted. "All evidence points to their having been politically

motivated." Though the new constitution does include an article explicitly obliging the State to ensure that women are not discriminated against, Adly expressed doubt as to whether there would be "the political will to implement this in the near future". "Of course it was worse during Morsi's time, in terms of violence towards women," she said. "The Muslim Brotherhood were very, very aggressive when speaking about women's rights. When we spoke about harassment, they wanted girls to be punished. You were, as a woman, responsible for any crime that happened to you." During its time in power, the Brotherhood expressed its support for a raft of regressive,



Afghan woman and freedom on wall.  
Image © Copyright dapd.

Magda Adly, co-founder of El Nadeem Center  
Photo via ANSAMed



repressive policies towards women - lowering of the legal age at which women can be married, stricter laws governing divorce, and a lifting of the ban on female genital mutilation. However, Adly said that “I am not comfortable about the level of violence against the Muslim Brotherhood. In ideological terms they are against me and I am against them. But violence is violence and terrorist groups will probably begin taking revenge.”

“And after attacking, killing, kidnapping, and putting Muslim Brotherhood supporters in jail, now the regime are going after the human rights organizations and the youth groups”, she said. “Mahienour and Hassan Mustafa, Alaa Abdul Fattah, Ahmed Douma - they were the 'flags' of the revolution two years back. Now they are in jail.”

Mahienour Al-Massry, an Alexandria-based lawyer known for her work for the rights of detainees, in labour movements and on behalf of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Egypt, was sentenced in absentia in early January to two years in jail for violating a recent law against unauthorized protests. Alaa Abdel Fattah, well-known blogger and political activist and son of the founder of the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, is in prison for allegedly organizing a political protest. Ahmed Douma, another prominent blogger and activist, was sentenced on December 22 to three years in prison with hard labour and a fine for taking part in protests.

## INDIA

Police in India [say](#) a young woman has been gang raped on the orders of a village council because she fell in love with a man from a different religion. 13 men have been arrested in West Bengal state. The woman told police that the village council in

Subalpur village ordered her to pay a fine for having an affair with the man. When her family said they were too poor to pay, the council ordered the gang rape. The woman told police she lost count of how many men raped her during the night-long ordeal. She is in hospital in the state’s Birbhum district where doctors said her condition is serious.



Photo: Raveendran/AFP/Getty Images

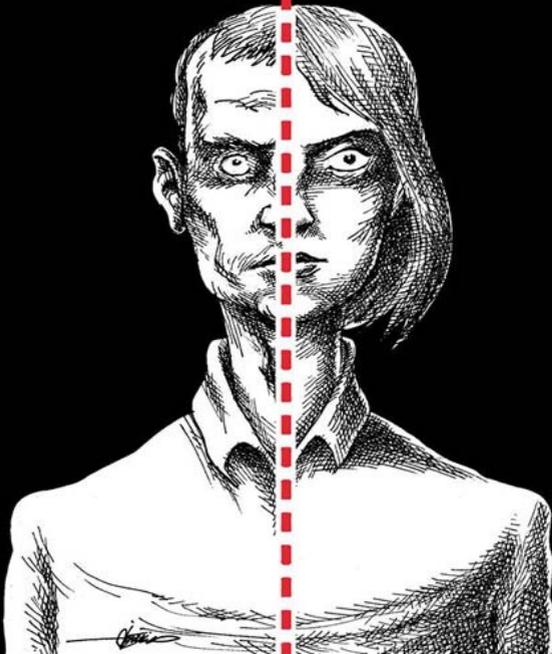
## INDONESIA

A city on Indonesia's Sumatra Island is about to force female students to pass a virginity test before they can go to high school. 51,000 people have already signed a petition calling for its end [here](#).

## IRAN

According to [Shargh](#) paper, more than 71% of households have satellite dishes though satellite dishes are banned by the Islamic Republic of Iran; in 1995, this was around 1%.

More than 650 Iranian citizens and civil activists have issued a [statement](#) objecting to the “Comprehensive Population and Family Excellence Plan” currently on the Iranian Parliament’s agenda, arguing that the plan would place undue restrictions on women’s employment and educational opportunities. The statement refers to the plan’s “regrettable articles” about the conditions of women, specifically in the parts pertaining to new restrictions on the use of contraceptives. It also refers to the plan as a measure that intends to further restrict women, particularly single women, from accessing employment and educational opportunities. “Much like the other laws and resolutions passed over recent years, women are again deprived of their rights in this plan and are only seen in their reproductive position. Is there no other way to promote excellence than to deprive women of



Gender Segregation in Iran. Cartoon by Mana Neyestani.

to produce more children and adding that the Iranian population should move toward at least 150 million people (almost double that of today). Recently billboards with the slogan "A single blossom is not spring" has began to pop up along major highways along with others encouraging families to have more children. Other billboards saying, "More children, better lives" depicted a large family bicycling happily on a single bicycle, with a father and son not so happily trailing behind. There was one notable exception on both bicycles. The mother was missing. In an interview with Fars, the director of the media production company behind the billboards said "Out of concern for appearing to promote cycling for women, we decided to exclude the family's mother from the picture". While cycling is not illegal for Iranian women, it has been discouraged and frowned upon for more than 30 years. Cycling on the streets has been described as "shameless and lust-provoking" by officials. In another billboard promoting the same subject, the modern family is shown

jobs, income, and education, and to limit women to the role of a procreation instrument and not as half of the population with rights?" says the statement. The statement cautions the Members of the Parliament that approving the plan will increase gender discrimination in Iran and will be "a huge regression for women" in the laws. The "Comprehensive Population and Family Excellence Plan" aims to encourage population growth in a departure from the current population control policies, which have been in effect for the past two decades.

on a rowboat, with the father sitting at one end of the boat and the mother at the other. The boys sitting in between have life jackets on, while the little girl does not.

Culture Minister Ali Jannati has been [questioned](#) in the Iranian parliament over some of his comments regarding the closure of newspapers and the solo singing of women. He said solo signing which has been banned may be permissible if it did not lead to "corruption".

After years of promoting a curb on population growth, Iran's supreme leader [has](#) begun encouraging people

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has issued a religious edict [banning](#) online chatting

between unrelated men and women. The ruling came days after Iranian authorities blocked WeChat. The authorities in Tehran are sensitive to social media and have blocked access to many social networking websites, including Facebook and Twitter. But many Iranian internet users are relying on proxies to circumvent the government censorship. Ironically, many Iranian officials, including President Hassan Rowhani, have active Facebook and Twitter accounts.



The first line of a billboard reads, "A single blossom is not spring/More children, a better life." (photo by www.askdin.com) via al-monitor.com

## IRAQ

A [report](#) from Baghdad said that gunmen killed 12 people including seven women at a brothel in the city. Security and medical officials said the attack took place at an apartment in the Zayouna area of east Baghdad on Jan 7. Police sources also said that a similar attack had taken place last year too. On May 22, gunmen attacked a house in Zayouna that was used as a brothel, killing 12 people. The week before, gunmen restrained police at a checkpoint in the area, and then shot dead 12 people at a row of adjoining alcohol shops nearby. Violence in Iraq has reached a level not seen since 2008, when the country was just emerging from a brutal period of sectarian killings. It took just five days for this month's death toll to surpass that for all of January last year.

## MALAYSIA

In what is seen as a sign of increasing Islamisation in Malaysia, the northern state of Pahang has [introduced](#) heavier penalties on "cross-dressers" under an amended Sharia law. Those arrested could face a maximum of a year's jail or be fined or both if convicted. The amended law, which came into effect on Dec 1, 2013, will only apply to Muslim men or women found to be wearing clothes of the opposite gender.



## MOROCCO

The parliament of Morocco has unanimously [amended](#) an article of the penal code that allowed rapists of underage girls to avoid prosecution by marrying their victims. Article 475 of the penal code generated unprecedented public criticism. It was first proposed by Morocco's Islamist-led government a year ago. But the issue came to public prominence in 2012 when 16-year-old Amina Filali killed herself after being forced to marry her rapist. The case shocked many people in Morocco, received extensive media coverage and sparked protests in the capital Rabat and other cities.

Morocco: a protest for Amina-Al-Filali. Photo via [theweek.co.uk](#)



Screen shot from *Pecah Lobang*, a 2009 documentary about transgender women in Malaysia.

## SAUDI ARABIA



Two Saudi women and two young girls walk in the marketplace in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. AP Photo.

Saudi Arabian authorities have [suspended](#) a monitoring system that text alerts Saudi women's male 'guardians' every time they cross the border to make amendments to the system; following review by officials, the new service will be optional.

A [picture](#) showing two men from the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice warning women against using the swings went viral. "Some viewers of the picture supported the move by the Commission members on the grounds women using the swing could encourage men to "harass or molest them" though "others said they believe the act is not acceptable as it amounted to an unjustified interference and repression of women by the



Saudi religious cops tell women not to use swings. Photo credit Al Sada.

Commission". Saudi Arabia's religious police also shut a restaurant for violations including allowing gender-mixing, "operating obscene TV channels and serving shisha in closed places".

Most women in Saudi Arabia out in public are shrouded from head to toe but just the sight of their made-up faces is apparently enough to incite men to molest them, according to a new [survey](#) of 992 Saudi men and women, conducted by the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue in Riyadh. The survey found that 86.5 percent of the men believed that women's elaborate make-up is to blame for a rise in molestation cases in the kingdom. No specific figures on current molestation rates or how molestation specifically is defined are available, but the Saudi authorities reported 2,797 cases of sexual harassment involving women and children in the first 10 months of 2013, with Riyadh leading the list with 650 cases. About 80 percent of those polled blamed lack of specific anti-molestation laws and lack of deterrent penalties as contributing to the problem. "Poor religious sentiment" was cited by 91 percent of those surveyed as another factor and 75 percent also blamed lack of awareness campaigns and warning notices in public places.

## SYRIA

Women have been [banned](#) from sitting on chairs and seeing male gynaecologists by the al-Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and Levant's recent occupation of Raqqah, a city in northern Syria. Also, women are obligated to wear the niqab and burqa; sweaters, jeans, and makeup of any kind are strictly banned.

Female clothing is not to be displayed in shop windows, and only women are allowed to work there; if a man is found on the grounds the shop faces closure. Smoking—cigarettes, water pipes, etc.—is banned. Violators could face the death penalty; shops found selling cigarettes are to be burned to the ground. All barbershops are to be closed down and men forbidden from having short hair, wearing modern hairstyles or

using hair products; men are also forbidden from wearing low-waist jeans. Anyone who uses the word "Daash" (an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Arabic) will receive 70 whippings; the organisation is to be referred to by its proper name.

"attacks on the sacred". Instead, Islam is recognised as the state religion and freedom of conscience is guaranteed. The assembly also forced a successful revote on a proposed amendment that would make it unlawful to accuse someone of apostasy, after a deputy claimed he had received death threats because a colleague accused him of being an "enemy of Islam".

## TUNISIA



Tunisian women protested for fundamental rights in Tunis in August, 2012. Photo: AFP.

Tunisia voted to enshrine gender equality in its draft constitution, a key step towards safeguarding its relatively progressive laws on women's rights, with the ruling Islamists under pressure to compromise. "All male and female citizens have the same rights and duties. They are equal before the law without discrimination", states article 20. The formula was agreed between the ruling Islamist party Ennahda and the secular opposition during negotiations to end months of political crisis that followed the assassination of a leftwing opposition politician by Islamists last year. Ennahda sparked a storm of controversy in 2012 when it tried to introduce gender "complementarity" rather than equality into the post-uprising constitution. Since the 1950s, when it gained independence from France, Tunisia has had the Arab world's most progressive laws on women's rights -- although men remain privileged notably over inheritance -- and Ennahda was suspected of wanting to roll back those rights. The Islamists also agreed in recent months to drop their insistence on Islam being the main source of legislation, or criminalising

## TURKEY

One out of every four brides is a child as families are increasingly applying to the court to change the date of birth of their daughters so that they can legally marry,

warned an

association of Turkish female lawyers. "There is an increase of 94 percent in application to courts by families to show their daughters age older, in order to get marriage permit", said Gülten Kaya, head of the female lawyers' commission of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations. The legal age for marriage in Turkey has been raised to 17 from 15, however the commission members said that the limit should be increased to the majority age of 18.

Photo via hurriyetdailynews.com



## arts corner

# HOSSEIN FATEMI, photographer “An Iranian Journey”

According to a news report, Hossein Fatemi’s “[An Iranian Journey](#)” is a series that shows young people’s public modesty and piety as a result of strict rules and regulations vanishing once they escape the wary gaze of authority. These youths play music, drink, smoke, co-mingle and enjoy other activities. They are online, on Facebook, and are politically engaged and simmering, craving freer speech but stifled by the Islamic regime of Iran’s rules. “Naturally, whatever you prevent a human being from doing, it makes them want to do it more,” said Fatemi, who is represented by Panos Pictures.

Fatemi sees his task as putting in the open what is shrouded in the dark. Whether it is alcohol consumption or patronizing prostitutes, he seeks to photograph what is forbidden. Fatemi was born in 1980, one year after the overthrow of the Shah and the establishment of the Islamic Republic that’s ruled since. Almost everybody he photographed in his project has only known Iranian life under theocracy.

Nevertheless, the youth of this generation, more so than their parents, is well-informed about the West, global affairs and politics. They embrace American culture and influence. They’re pacifists, he said, and more than anything else, they crave a more open society where freedom of expression and speech are protected.

All photos are copyright Hossein Fatemi. Visit his official website: [www.hosseinfatemi.com](http://www.hosseinfatemi.com)



# upcoming events



## The Religious Right, Secularism & Civil Rights

**OCTOBER 11-12, 2014 | TOWER HILL HOTEL, LONDON, UK**

Join a **weekend of discussions and debates** on the religious right, its attacks on civil rights and freedoms, and the role of secularism for 21st century humanity.

The Arab uprisings; Sharia and religious laws; the burqa and conspicuous religious symbols; freedom of expression and its limits; apostasy, blasphemy and free thought; "Islamophobia" and racism; honour crimes; faith schools and religious education; reproductive rights and secular values will be amongst the **topics discussed**.

The conference is **endorsed by** Atheist Alliance International; Children First Now; Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain; Equal Rights Now; Fitnah; International Committee against Stoning; International Committee against Execution; International Federation of Iranian Refugees; Iran Solidarity; One Law for All; Secularism is a Women's Issue; The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science UK; & Women Living Under Muslim Laws, amongst others.

**FOR ORGANISATIONS OR VENDORS WISHING TO BOOKS STALLS,  
FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO PURCHASE TICKETS, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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**For up to date information on the conference, please visit [www.secularconference.com](http://www.secularconference.com)**

# upcoming events



## The Religious Right, Secularism & Civil Rights

### WEEKEND ADMISSION

2-day conference, including lunches, a cocktail reception and a Saturday evening dinner and entertainment.

**UNWAGED** £150

**WAGED** £160

**ORGANISATIONS** £170

**PRICE AFTER 1 MAY 2014: UNWAGED £155, WAGED £170, ORGANISATIONS £180.**

### SINGLE ADMISSION

Admission to **either** Saturday or Saturday conference (including lunch), **or** Saturday dinner & entertainment.

**UNWAGED** £50

**WAGED** £60

**ORGANISATIONS** £70

**PRICE AFTER 1 MAY 2014: UNWAGED £55, WAGED £70, ORGANISATIONS £80.**

**REGISTRATION FEES ARE NON-REFUNDABLE AFTER MAY 1, 2014.**

**For up to date information on the conference, please visit [www.secularconference.com](http://www.secularconference.com)**

PHOTO CREDIT: Ezequiel Scagnetti © European Union (Front)

# editorial

## HASSAN ROUHANI'S CHARM OFFENSIVE IS JUST PLAIN OFFENSIVE

**MARYAM NAMAZIE**

Rouhani's "charm offensive" (including the "historic nuclear deal" and the promise of opening Iran up for business) is the other side of the coin of the regime's intensification of repression. If you smile rather than scowl and utter sweet nothings and empty promises, the global powers that be are happy to ignore what happens to people in Iran. I suppose it is what they mostly do themselves every few years come election time. Protestations of "human rights abuses" are only useful when the regime doesn't play nice.

But it's not a "charm offensive" by any means; it's just plain offensive.

During the "election", Rouhani "promised" that "all Iranian people should feel there is justice". They are certainly feeling it - his version of it at least - with 40 executions in the first two weeks of January and over 300 executions since he took office. Iran remains one of the main execution capitals of the world despite all claims of "moderation". When Rouhani said "We must do something for all these prisoners to be released", he must have meant in body bags.

Also, Rouhani's "promise" to uphold the rights of the people as enumerated in the country's constitution is yet another example of an empty exercise in PR. The

constitution is one of the obstacles to upholding rights and actually violates them as does a theocracy. Article 20 of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution, for example, says men and women "enjoy equal protection of the law...in conformity with Islamic criteria" and Article 21 states that "the government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria". As a result, it is perfectly legal that women cannot run for presidency, enter sports stadiums and certain fields of work or study, are segregated and have limited rights to divorce and child custody.

In less than 6 months of his presidency, his pledge to uphold the rights of women and bring legislation to the Islamic Assembly that addressed discrimination has only translated into more discrimination and misogyny, including the legalisation of paedophilia and child rape by making it legal for step-fathers to marry their adopted daughters as well as plans for a "Comprehensive Population and Family Excellence Plan". The proposed legislation includes new limits on contraceptive use and added restrictions on women from accessing employment and educational opportunities. More efforts in lieu of keeping women in their place - barefoot and pregnant.

*"Article 20 of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution says that men and women "enjoy equal protection of the law...in conformity with Islamic criteria", and Article 21 states that "the government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria". As a result, it is perfectly legal that women cannot run for presidency, enter sports stadiums and certain fields of work or study, are segregated, and have limited rights to divorce and child custody."*

Of course the list is endless. Rouhani and his friends Tweet their sweet nothings and have Facebook pages whilst people in Iran are banned from using social media and can actually face arrest and harassment for it. Khamenei just issued a fatwa making it illegal to chat with unrelated members of the opposite sex.

And Iran remains the second largest jailer of journalists (forget political dissidents and opponents) though Rouhani “promised” that “justice means that anyone who wants to speak in a society should be able to come out, speak their mind, criticize and critique without hesitation and stammering”.

Add the regime’s draconian austerity measures and even the welcome end to economic sanctions will not be enough to give relief to the struggling people of Iran.

Absurdly, those celebrating Rouhani’s “charm” claim he is not to blame for the repression as he has no power – the supreme leader Khamenei does. Aside from the fact that Khamenei approved his candidacy, if Rouhani has no power, why so much jubilation? And if he does, then why not hold him accountable?

Of course any relief as a result of a reduction of

economic sanctions, which adversely hurt the public, and a move away from threats of war is good but it’s not good enough.

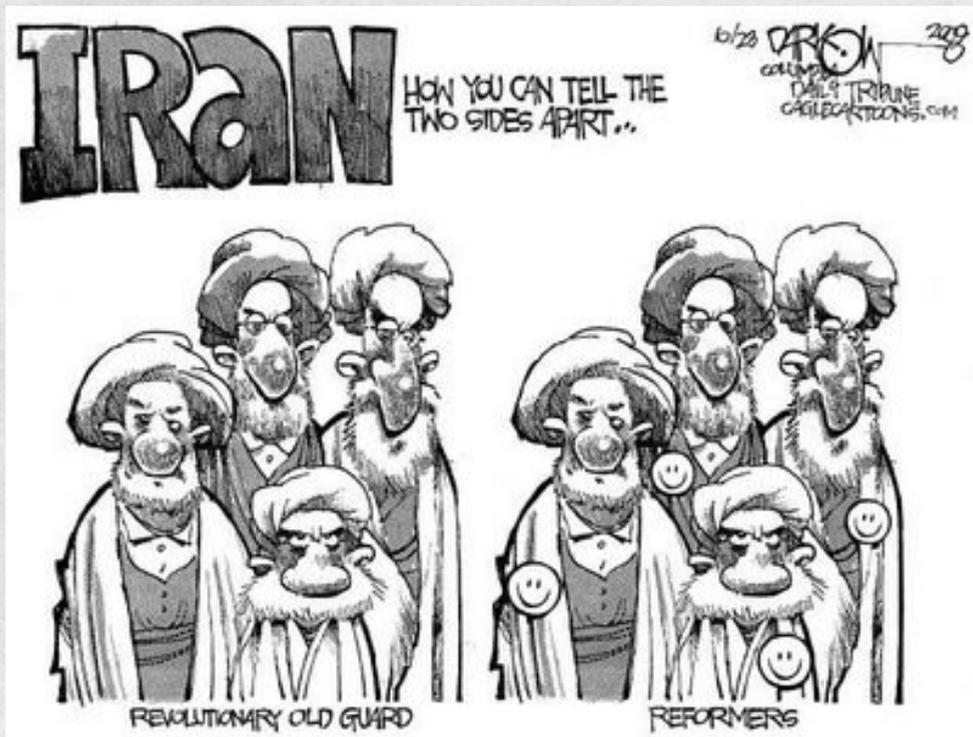
The people of Iran deserve more. Much more.

In the unforgettable [words](#) of Bob Dylan:

*...Yes, how many years can some people exist  
Before they're allowed to be free?  
Yes, how many times must a man turn his head  
And pretend that he just doesn't see?...*

*How many times must a man look up  
Before he can really see the sky?  
Yes, how many ears must one man have  
Before he can hear people cry?  
Yes, how many deaths will it take till he knows  
That too many people have died?  
The answer my friend is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.*

.....



# editorial

## WORLD HIJAB DAY

MARYAM NAMAZIE



"Ghost" - an installation by artist Kader Attia.

1 February is "World Hijab Day".

What next? Maybe a **World Mutilation Day** to show support for women and girls who have been mutilated and **World Child Marriages Day** when we can marry off our under-aged daughters to show support and solidarity with religious and cultural practices that are making life a living hell for women and girls. How about a **World Suttee Day** when women can jump (or more likely be pushed) on the burning pyres of their dead husbands, or a **World Foot-binding Day**?

I keep being told that these are not one and the same but they are. The veil – whether you choose to wear it or not; whether you think it is folksy or

not – is a tool like many others **to control, restrict and suppress women and girls.**

On World Hijab Day, please do take some time out to think not of the very few women who promote the veil as a right and choice (and who mainly live in the west or are Islamism's defenders) but the innumerable who refuse and resist veiling at great risk to themselves.

On World Hijab Day, let's remember them, stand with them, and say loudly and clearly that **nothing can justify women's oppression.**

.....

# our campaigns

## END BAN ON FEMALE FANS IN IRAN STADIUMS FOR ALL

Iranians are football crazy but women are banned from entering football stadiums. Some circumvent the rules by dressing as men to gain entry. Those found out are harassed, fined and detained.

As a result of widespread protests, the FIFA President raised the issue of women at football matches.

In the run-up to the June 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, we call for football stadiums for all.

The Islamic regime of Iran's 34-year ban on female fans must end.



Photo via Serat news.



Photo via tabnak.ir

Over 130 distinguished signatories are calling for "Stadiums for All" and an end to the Islamic Republic of Iran's 34-year ban on female fans in the run-up to the June 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil.

Signatories to the open letter include:

Alda Facio, Founder and First Director of the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice at the International Criminal Court;  
Amel Grami, Professor at the Tunisian University of Manouba;  
Amina Sboui, Tunisian Activist;  
Åsa Dahlström Heuser, President of the Secular Humanist League of Brazil;  
Fatou Sow, International Director of Women Living Under Muslim Laws;  
Fereydoon Farahi, Singer and Musician;  
Harold Walter Kroto, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry;  
Hassan Zerehi, Journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Shahrvand Newspaper;  
Jean-Claude Pecker, Astronomer and Former Director of the Nice Observatory;  
Lawrence Krauss, Theoretical Physicist and Cosmologist;  
Marieme Helie Lucas, Founder of Secularism is a

Women's Issue;  
Maryam Namazie, Spokesperson of One Law for All and Fitnah;  
Mina Ahadi, Spokesperson of the International Committee against Stoning and Execution;  
Nazanin Afshin-Jam, Human Rights Activist;  
Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan;  
Scientist Richard Dawkins;  
Shadi Sadr, Human Rights Lawyer;  
Shahyar Ghanbari, Iranian Lyricist, Songwriter and Singer of Persian Pop Music;  
Siba Shakib, Author;  
Steven Weinberg, Theoretical Physicist and Nobel Laureate in Physics

The ban on women in stadiums is yet another example of gender segregation and discrimination against women. For many years now, women in Iran have opposed the ban, including by issuing petitions, organising

meetings and protests at stadiums and even risking arrest by dressing as men in order to circumvent the prohibition. This open letter aims to gather further support for women and men in Iran opposing gender segregation and for stadiums for all.

The full list of signatories to the open letter can be found [here](#).

To support Stadiums for All, please sign the [petition](#); Tweet: #IRWomenStadium and “like” our [Facebook page](#).

**The ban on female fans in Iran must end.**

**And it must end now.**

## Stadiums for all in Iran



Photo from: [tracking.sl.com](http://tracking.sl.com)

**End Ban on Female Fans  
Give the red card to gender segregation!**

Visit: [www.fitnah.org](http://www.fitnah.org) Tweet: #IRWomenStadium

# letters to the editor

Send questions and comments to [fitnah.movement@gmail.com](mailto:fitnah.movement@gmail.com) and we will respond in the next issue of the publication.

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## join us

Fitnah – Movement for Women’s Liberation is a protest movement demanding freedom, equality, and secularism and calling for an end to misogynist cultural, religious and moral laws and customs, compulsory veiling, sex apartheid, sex trafficking, and violence against women. We remind the Islamic regime of Iran and Islamists everywhere that the women’s liberation movement is a source of fitnah for their rule alone. We are Islamism’s worst fitnah!

**To join Fitnah – Movement for Women’s Liberation, [visit here.](#)**

**[Click ‘like’ on our Facebook page.](#)**

**Supporters include:** *Amina Tyler, Tunisian topless activist; Avijit Roy, Activist, Bangladesh; Chadi Bejjani, Lebanese Atheists, Lebanon; Dya Ahmad, Member of Youth Parliament in Iraq and Secretary of Student and Youth organisation in Iraq; Harold Walter Kroto, Nobel Prize in Chemistry Winner, UK; Imad Iddine Habib, Founder, Moroccan Council of Ex-Muslims, Morocco; Inna Shevchenko, Spokesperson, FEMEN, France; Karl Karnadi, Founder, Indonesian Atheists, Indonesia; Lloyd Newson, Director of DV8 Physical Theatre, UK; Maryam Jamel, Organisation of Women’s Liberation of Iraq; Nadia El-Fani, Tunisian Filmmaker; most recent films “Neither Allah nor Master” and “Our Breasts; Our Arms”, France; Raheel Raza, President, Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, Canada; Safia Lebdi, Founder, “Les insoumis-es”, France; Shahin Najafi, Independent Anarchist Artist, Germany; Soad Baba Aissa, President, of Association pour l’Egalité, la Mixité et la Laïcité en Algérie, France; Soraya L. Chemaly, Writer and Activist, USA; Tarek Fatah, Writer, Canada; Taslima Nasrin, Bangladeshi Writer, India; Waleed Al-Husseini, Palestinian Blogger and Founder of Council of Ex-Muslims of France, France; and Zari Asli, Women’s Rights Campaigner, Canada.*



**Visit our new website  
designed by Siamak Amjadi:  
[www.fitnah.org](http://www.fitnah.org)**