

AGAINST GENDER APARTHEID: MIXING IS THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

Interview with Marieme Helie Lucas

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AGAINST GENDER APARTHEID: MIXING IS THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

Interview with Marieme Helie Lucas

Maryam Namazie: *What is the nature of the recent sex segregation scandal at Universities UK where the representative body issued guidance saying side by side sex segregation was permissible? Why does it occur and by whom is it imposed? Also, it's more than just a question of physical separation isn't it?*

Marieme Helie Lucas: Just like with the niqab, it's an extreme-Right political organisation working under the cover of religion to promote sex segregation as a pawn in the political landscape and using all possible means to make itself visible and impose its mores and laws. The idea is to permanently demonstrate that the law of god (as interpreted by them) supersedes the law of the people. It is a blatant attack on the very principle of democracy and one woman/man, one vote, particularly relevant in the aftermath of Nelson Mandela's death.

The UK has laws for gender equity; therefore, the government should be clear that these laws are the only ones applicable in the UK. However we know that this is not the case as it has already accepted a parallel legal system [what's known as Sharia Courts or Muslim Arbitration Tribunals] which does not grant women the same rights as the law of the land does. This is a major setback.

As long as all these attempts by Muslim fundamentalists - whether in the form of different rights for different categories of citizens, veiling, sex segregation and so on - is not analysed in political terms - as the expression of an anti-democratic programme, but rather in terms of religion or culture, the British government will not limit the rise of this extreme-Right movement, which will be increasingly difficult to control.

Those of us who clearly see the rise of a new form of fascism - mostly because we come from situations in which we have had to live under the boot of fundamentalists - are left to our own devices to struggle against it. It is not very different from the situation of anti-Nazi Germans

who were not listened to, for far too long, until a bloody war was inevitable.

Maryam Namazie: *Universities UK's guidance first said (though it has now been withdrawn as a result of pressure) if women are not made to sit at the back of the room but are segregated alongside men, since none are disadvantaged, then there is no discrimination. Your views?*

Marieme Helie Lucas: Whether at the back or on the side, the old argument is always that this is done to protect women - for their own good, of course, and by doing so to restrict their freedom of movement. By the same logic, some twenty years ago, Bangladesh suddenly restricted women from leaving the country as there was a lot of trafficking of women in the region. What appeared to be their solution was NOT to arrest pimps-protectors, but to prevent women from travelling without a wali (a male guardian from their family). Please note that Bangladesh does not even abide by the Maliki School, in which the institution of wali is legal.

What is discriminatory is to assign a place to somebody, whatever that place may be. It says: keep to your place; to women's place!

Universities have no business pandering to such requests, and if they do, what's next? Fundamentalist speakers will only address audiences where females are fully covered?

It seems we are already witnessing some of the next steps. According to media reports, in one instance at a UK university, women were not only segregated but

Universities UK
You are now entering a
segregated area.

Mixing of the sexes strictly prohibited.

had to give their questions in writing to the speaker, whilst men could raise theirs. As one knows, their voices are sexually attractive and fundamentalists plug their ears against temptation – hence the ban on singing in the areas the Taliban control...

What is sure is that fundamentalists will not stop here and will produce more and more demands, since the aim is not to get satisfaction for a specific demand, but to gain political ground.

Maryam Namazie: Omar Ali, of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies, says 'segregation' is 'an emotive use of language'. 'If a society is set up to cater for religious needs on campus, why shouldn't they? 'A lot of people would find it insulting to say this is something discriminatory against women.'

Marieme Helie Lucas: Why should religious needs be catered to on campus? If we launch a society for the rights of naturists, should universities cater to our need to organise healthy debates in the nude (in summer only), and to exclude or seclude those who do not adhere to putting our philosophy in practice? Or is Mr. Omar Ali's religious ideology considered by university authorities more valuable than my naturist philosophy? In that case, I could take the authorities to court for discrimination against my philosophy, for creating a hierarchy of rights amongst different views and beliefs.

What is to be allowed on campus? What is in keeping with a university's general mission of expanding knowledge and reasoning? I presume that my naturist philosophy could be and should be of interest to all to debate about on campus, but that my insistence to put my beliefs in practice may not be considered as indispensable to the exchange of ideas.

Maryam Namazie: Separating men and women isn't necessarily discriminatory and can reflect personal preferences, such as women-only gyms on women-only refuges. The head of Universities UK which issued the guidance endorsing segregation of the sexes says: "It is possible for women to choose to be educated in an all-women environment. It's not

something which is so alien to our culture that it has to be regarded like race segregation, which is totally different and it's unlawful and there's no doubt about that whatsoever." Are racial and gender segregation incomparable? Why is it that everyone can see the distinction between a black university and racial apartheid but when it comes to gender, it's not as obvious?

Marieme Helie Lucas: Many of our feminist weapons have been turned against us along the years... and I have come to this very sad conclusion that we were not smart enough to think, as thinkers and philosophers should, about all the facets of the concepts we were grappling with. Just think of our feminist praise for diversity, whilst all along we knew that difference was used to legitimise the racist South African apartheid regime, or the segregationist states of the USA. This concept is now used to legitimise the imposition of differences on women that make them unequal in the name of religion, ethnicity or culture.

I think we should urgently question the present trend to regroup with 'the same' in order to protect ourselves from 'the other'. It seems to me that this is a general trend, from the creation of Israel to the dismantling of the former Yugoslavia, to the creation of ghettos - whether for Blacks - or increasingly for wealthy Whites, Asians, Muslims, Sikhs... you name it.

We are slowly returning to the ethnic/racial/religious/gender purity which induces us to stay amongst 'the same'. Decades ago, I wrote a chapter entitled 'What is your tribe? The construction of Muslimness' in which I discussed the fear of the other to discover that the other is the same...

Mixing is the future of humanity.

Maryam Namazie: Cultural relativists will say that gender segregation is people's culture and beliefs and must be respected. If the speaker wants segregation, and the audience are okay with it, what's the problem? Is denying the right to "voluntary" gender segregation a denial of the right to manifest religion? The head of UUK says: "If

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people feel more comfortably about sitting separately, and that's invariably the situation that will arise in these cases, then universities have to listen to those views."

Marieme Helie Lucas: There are two underlying questions here: the first one is about the limits to respect for 'The Other's' culture/religion...; the second is about who speaks for culture; who speaks for religion?

On respect, the real question is: should everything be respected? Is Female Genital Mutilation to be respected because old men think that is their culture – and even if some women also think it is their culture? Should forced marriage or child marriage be respected? Should public flogging for adultery be respected? Should stoning to death be respected? Or for that matter should the death penalty be respected at all?

There is a relativist culture of non commitment and neutrality that has been expanding - certainly in the West, under the influence of liberalism, of human rights organisations and of political correctness and the fear of appearing racist. Accordingly, everything is equal; everything has to be respected on par - the right of the capitalist and the right of the worker, the right of the one who holds the gun and the right of the one who runs for his life away from the gun... It is high time to admit that there are conflicting rights, antagonistic rights.

It seems to me that progressive people have forgotten the virtues of being partisan. I want to stand for the right of the worker, not that of the capitalist, for the right of the man who runs for his life, not for the right of the man who holds the gun, and for the right of women to live their lives without interference from extreme-Right religious people.

There can be a principled response regarding respect for 'The Other' and its limits, but this first question can also lead to another: who decides that THIS is The Culture of a group?

We could immediately produce, of course, hundreds and thousands and even millions of people, in each specific country, who would vouch that 'this' (be it stoning, FGM, child marriage, etc...) is by no means their culture/their religion, not the culture they feel they belong to, or the religion they believe in.

Do we believe that those presently standing in their own countries or in the diaspora against FGM, public

flogging, death penalty for atheists, etc... have less legitimacy in representing their people, their culture, their religion than those who stand for it?

Are we really saying that women fighting against sex segregation today in their own countries are alien to their culture?

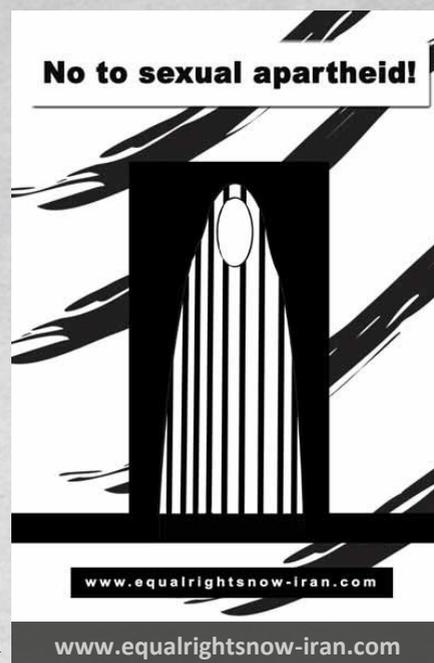
That they are illegitimate representatives of their cultures?

This stems from a definition of culture as fixed in the past, a-historical, not as a moving, living, permanently changing, social organisation. But then WHEN is a culture arrested in history, in which year? In the years of slavery, in the years when women did not vote, in the years when women did not have access to contraception, or could not open their own bank accounts? In which of these historical steps is a culture 'arrested' to be seen as authentic?

To me, the women who fight against FGM or stoning for sex outside marriage or for gender equality, etc are the representatives of today's culture in their country.

It seems to me that cultural relativists are furiously and deeply racist since they exclusively promote as true and legitimate the worst possible opinions of extreme-Right Muslims. If anyone, white, European, would utter similar opinions about their white European co-citizens, these same cultural relativists would shrink in horror and refuse to shake their hand. One can only conclude that cultural relativists think that a Muslim must be a horrible reactionary, otherwise s/he is not a true Muslim. Isn't that racist?

Maryam Namazie: *Universities UK has even gone so far as to say that denying segregation may violate the free speech of those speakers who cannot speak except to segregated audiences due to their strongly held beliefs. Is this really about free speech or for that matter the right to religion?*



Marieme Helie Lucas: This is the very old and always successful story of blaming the victim. When professor Krauss walked out of the debate at a UK university, although he had announced in advance that he would not participate in it should it be segregated, he was shouted out by Muslim fundamentalist students as 'intolerant'; he was a little surprised...

At the beginning of the 70's in Algiers I had two similar experiences:

I was in a queue waiting to vote when the man before me handed eleven (11, you read well) ID cards for all the women in his family whom he was voting for to the voting booth authority. I objected that this was illegal; the staff at the voting booth, the very person who was supposed to guarantee the respect of law accused me of being against the right of women to vote. These women, he said, could not get out of the house, hence their only way of voting was by giving their IDs to the male in the family. And who was I, a woman, objecting to women's rights as citizens; how dared I?

Also in the early seventies, when for the first time a non-indigenous form of veiling appeared in the streets of Algiers, in fact an early Iranian style of chador that women in Turkey still wear, a sort of long rain coat on trousers, with a tight head scarf, it was labelled 'the students' dress'. Most female students in Algiers, especially during the first decade after independence, usually wore western clothes and did not cover their heads. It was clearly an offensive from Muslim fundamentalist groups; they were doing a lot of social work and, together with other goods, would distribute to poor families the so-called students' dress, in fact the early model of what was to become 'the Islamic dress'. Orhan Pamuk described the same thing in Turkey, saying that it was virtually impossible to refuse this 'gift' while accepting all the others indispensable ones.

When I raised the issue of veiling young women, I was told that I was preventing women access to universities; that I was denying women the right to study! Without this outfit, fundamentalists said, fathers would not allow girls to go to university (a blatant lie, as Algerian fathers after independence were most willing to send all their children to university, boys and girls alike; schooling was entirely free and lunch was provided), hence I was depriving girls of their right to education by questioning their alien outfit...

By the way, how come we haven't heard the devotees of untouchable cultures speaking up against this brand new dress code? Wasn't this costume that we had never seen before alien to our culture?

While attacking our most basic rights, fundamentalists managed to put the blame us, the victims of their manipulation, just as in rape cases: "yes I raped her, but what was she doing at this time of the day/or night in this place? And what was she wearing; how was she dressed? She was actually looking for it, she is the culprit and I am the innocent..."

We have no more reason to accept this reversing of responsibilities from Muslim fundamentalists than we did from rapists.

Maryam Namazie: *There is often a problem in addressing issues such as sex apartheid, "Sharia" courts or the niqab as the links between these and Islamism is often kept hidden and it is portrayed as a matter of choice and rights. We often see the use of rights language to push forwards restrictions on rights in the name of religion. Your views?*

Marieme Helie Lucas: Our friend Cherifa Kheddar, herself a survivor of an attack on her family by armed fundamentalist groups in the nineties in Algeria is often quoted by Karima Bennoune in her book and her articles. She says that it is useless to fight 'terrorism'

"Do we believe that those presently standing in their own countries or in the Diaspora against FGM, public flogging, death penalty for atheists, etc... have less legitimacy in representing their people, their culture, their religion than those who stand for it?"

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without fighting its root cause: 'Islamism' i.e. the ideology which engenders terrorism.

There is an ideological battle going on, as well as very concrete ones. Introducing parallel legal systems, making one's political presence visible thanks to more and more women wearing a so-called 'Islamic dress', gender segregation, the revival of medieval forms of punishment such as beheading (let's not forget it happened in Woolwich not so long ago) or stoning or flogging or amputation of limbs - all this does not come in a vacuum. There is a correlation between all these demands; and there is a deliberate political will behind it. I cannot believe that there are blue-eyed dogooders who do not see the links, even if they may not analyse this phenomenon politically.

The very sad and very dangerous part of the story is that only the classical racist far-Right organisations in Europe seem to identify the problem. And they use it to further their xenophobic anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-others agenda.

Our betrayal and abandonment by the Left, its denial of the right-wing agenda of Muslim fundamentalists, its hiding behind anti-imperialism, is what causes

most difficulties for us anti-fundamentalists from Muslim-majority countries living in Europe. While denouncing fundamentalists, we have to constantly strive to avoid getting used politically by the classical racist far-Right.

Had the Left in Europe had a clear political analysis regarding the rise of the Muslim-Right, we would not be stuck with the perverse manipulation of liberal language. It is in the name of rights that Algerian anti-fundamentalist resistance has been abandoned to its fate - 200,000 victims mostly at the hands of armed fundamentalist groups. It is in the name of rights that the Iranian theocracy has been put in place. Theocrats being hailed by the Coward Left; what more can one say about the absurd dreadful situation in which we are?

The theory of priorities still operates, as well as that of the "main enemy" and the "secondary enemy": we are being eaten up by our secondary enemy, whilst the main enemy, US imperialism, is quietly allying in Afghanistan and elsewhere with the secondary enemy, Muslim fundamentalist forces which own and/or control gas and other natural resources...

Maryam Namazie: Gender apartheid is hugely contested in places like Iran, Algeria and Tunisia. Isn't ironic that it would be promoted at UK universities as a right? What are the links between the fight in the Middle East, Asia and North Africa against gender apartheid and those at British universities?

Marieme Helie Lucas:

We are fighting the same battle, except that the issue seems much clearer when one lives inside a Muslim-majority country than when living in the diaspora in Europe. The list of signatories to the petition against UUK guidelines shows that women fighting fundamentalist forces in Muslim-majority countries are very much aware of the fact that it is a common battle.

Marieme Helie Lucas is an Algerian sociologist and founder of Secularism is a Women's Issue.

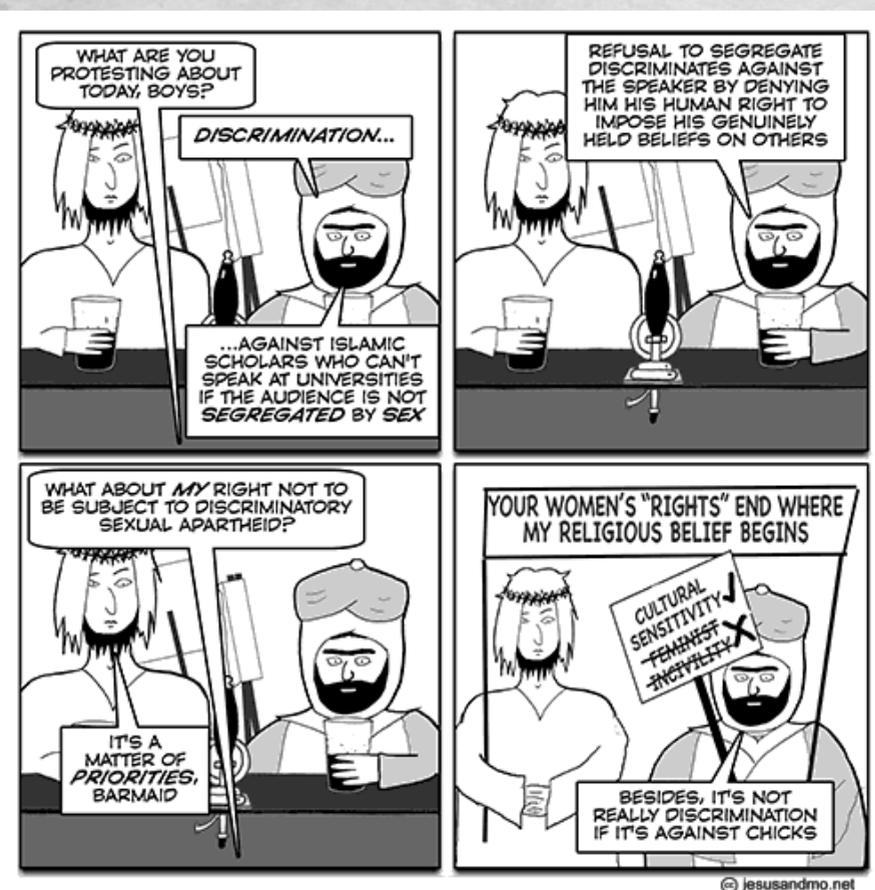


Image from Jesus and Mo cartoon: www.jesusandmo.net

newsflash

GENERAL

A UN General Assembly committee has [agreed](#) to a landmark first resolution on women's rights defenders, despite a hard fought campaign by an alliance including the Vatican, Iran, Russia, China and others to weaken the measure. A Norwegian-led coalition, which has prepared the resolution for months, had to delete language that condemned "all forms of violence against women" to get the text passed by consensus.

IRAN

The Department of Women and Family affairs in President Rouhani's government has been [given](#) the task of determining policies aimed at increasing the Iranian population. A work-group had been set up to provide the government with recommendations and advice. In recent weeks Iranian officials and politicians have expressed their concern about the low rate of population growth in the country and called for a solution. One major factor is that many of those born after the 1979 revolution are postponing marriage until too old to have many children.

The new president Hassan Rouhani pledged during election campaign speeches that he 'would not allow any agent to question anyone in the street' and that 'girls should feel secure'. But only four months later, the Headquarters for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has announced improperly dressed

women will be issued with official warnings. Cleric Hayder Zahraei, who is in charge of the nationwide plan, said: 'This grand plan will be implemented in some 200 cities across the country. The plan will be expanded and fully implemented in society.' Brig. Genral Ahmadi Moghadam, commander of the State Security Forces, also said on August 12: "With Rouhani there will be no changes with regards to the veil." On September 8 an order was issued to 'intensify dealing with women who are not properly dressed'.

INDIA

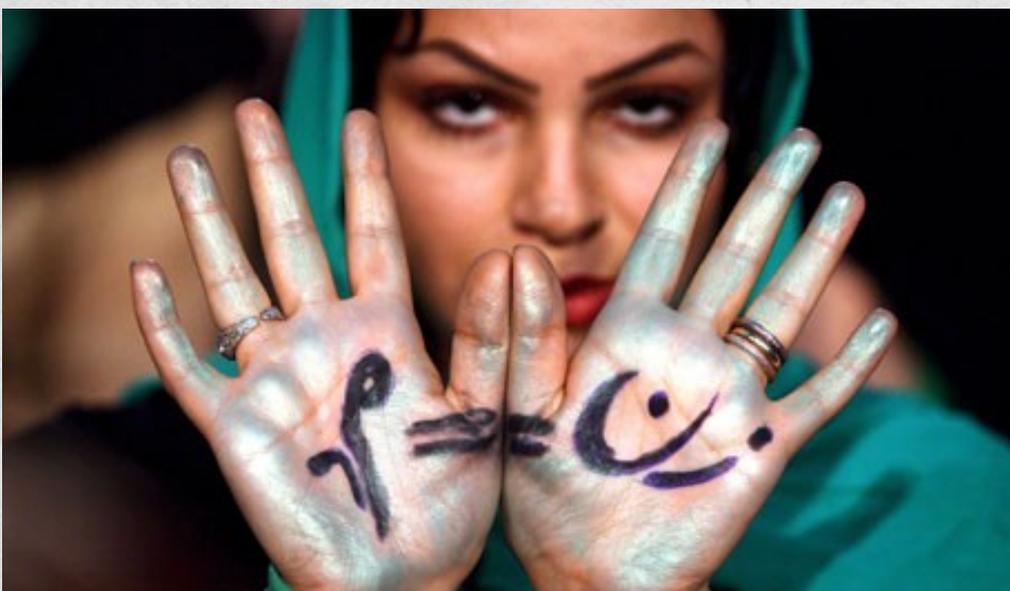
Women in India will never be safe until society changes its attitudes, the father of 'Nirbhaya' the Delhi gang-rape victim [said](#) on the anniversary of the assault which killed her. But one year after the incident, the victim's family is still deep in grief and fearful for India's women who they say remain in danger. "As long as the mindset of the society will not change, women can never be safe out on the roads... every other day cases of rape and sexual harassment are getting reported, where is the change?"

MOROCCO

Women's rights activists in Morocco have [criticised](#) the Islamist-led government for excluding them from drafting proposed legislation to combat violence against women and for seeking to dilute the bill through changes. The long-awaited bill is currently under study in Morocco. It comes after the adoption of a new constitution in 2011 that enshrines gender equality and urges the state to promote it.

NIGERIA

About 100 women [rallied](#) outside Enugu State government offices on 10 December, demanding an end to "the killing of women through fetish activities of chief priests and deities". Such activities are believed to have cost 11 women their lives in just two weeks. Wearing black dresses and holding palm leaves, the



Woman = Man. Written in Persian on an Iranian woman's hands. Photo credit: Abedin Taherkenareh/EPA via The Guardian

protesters also demanded a ban on "forced marriages" to traditional gods as this violates several articles of the Nigerian constitution. Among the reported incidents is the chief priest of the deity Iyakpala Ugbaike allegedly forcing the daughter of a deceased man to marry him after claiming the same deity killed her father.

SAUDI ARABIA



Within their [female-only campuses](#), women at Saudi Arabia's universities let loose. In their bags, the textbooks vary, but one item is mandatory: a floor-length black abaya robe that each must cover herself with when she steps through the university gates back to the outside world. Within the campus grounds — a world of strictly female students, teachers and staff — women have some greater freedoms. But outside, women remain bound by a web of customs and religious strictures. Women are kept segregated from men, are barred from simple rights like driving and

required to adhere to strict dress codes that often require them to cover their hair and face with a black veil. They are ruled by the whim of male relatives whose permission is required for a woman to work, get an education, or travel under "guardianship laws".

Abdullah Mohammad Al Dawood, a Saudi Arabian writer, through his Twitter account has [asked](#) all his followers to sexually molest women who work as cashiers in stores. This campaign has been launched on social networking websites in order to attack the practice of including more and more Saudi women into the country's private sector.

TANZANIA

While Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is on the decline in Tanzania, the practice remains widespread in some rural areas, and in Maasai communities like Lingate in the northern Arusha region, dozens of [women](#) are being turned away in marriage because they have refused to be cut, according to an NGO working in the region. In another [report](#), 33 women have been arrested for mutilating girls aged 3-15.

TURKEY

The number of women in Turkey who sought the support of the Family and Social Policies Ministry due to domestic violence totalled more than 5,000 last year, [according](#) to Minister Fatma Şahin.



TUNISIA

First, it was the schools that were reserved for Salafists and fundamentalists. Then, Islamic banks appeared for those who want their money to be handled in accordance with Islamic law. Now, Salafists and "true Muslims" have their own [restaurants](#) with a space dedicated to women wearing the niqab, where they can eat separately while enjoying the privacy provided by wooden screens.

arts corner

KIANA HAYERI, photographer

“Beyond The Veil”

Kiana Hayeri's photographic project [Beyond the Veil](#) shows a predominantly young Iranian population (more than seventy-five percent is under the age of thirty-five) challenging compulsory hijab or veiling and restrictive rules in the way they dress or interact with the opposite sex despite fines, imprisonment and worse.

Many take risks to put on a bit more makeup, wear more colourful clothing, reveal bare arms, push their headscarves farther back or do things behind closed doors that are banned. Embodying a personality and determination of this generation, Beyond the Veil captures, in subtle and quiet ways, a window into this disobedience both behind closed doors and on the streets of Tehran.

This project not only explores the 'veil' in its literal sense of the word, the Hijab, but also as the curtain that delicately separates public and private lives of Iranians.



All photos are copyright **Kiana Hayeri**. Visit her official website: www.kianahayeri.com

upcoming events



The Religious Right, Secularism & Civil Rights

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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.

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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:**

Post: BM Box 2387, London, WC1N 3XX, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0) 7719166731

E-mail: onelawforall@gmail.com or fitnah.movement@gmail.com

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For up to date information on the conference, please visit 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

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

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

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For up to date information on the conference, please visit www.secularconference.com

PHOTO CREDIT: Ezequiel Scagnetti © European Union (Front)

editorial

GENDER APARTHEID IS AN ISLAMIST DEMAND

MARYAM NAMAZIE

Segregation of the sexes is an Islamist demand though it is often couched as a right and demand of 'Muslims'. When Islamists have state power like in Iran or Saudi Arabia, it's the law. Transgressing it can mean fines, imprisonment or worse. There, women must enter government offices via separate entrances from men; they must sit behind men or boys in classrooms and at the back of the bus...

Like racial apartheid in South Africa, gender apartheid is segregation based on the inequities between genders. The 'logic' behind it is that women are not equal but 'complementary' to men and, if unveiled and un-segregated, are a source of fitnah and affliction in society. Whilst this perspective is debasing to women, it's also demeaning to men who are seen to be unable to control their sexual urges. An unveiled, un-segregated woman is like uncovered meat or sweets, 'asking for it' – a whore. It follows, therefore, that the woman who refuses to veil (or 'properly' veil) or segregate and who enters the public space on her own terms is considered open season.

One of the slogans of the Islamists attacking women who had joined the 1979 mass demonstration in Iran against compulsory veiling was: 'Ya rusari, Ya tusari' (either the veil or a punch). Abdullah Mohammad Al Dawood, a Saudi Arabian writer, recently asked his followers to sexually molest women who work so as to stop women from leaving their homes. In Egypt, the sexual violence against women is often spearheaded by the state in order to prevent women from protesting in the public space... This is also fundamentally why the Taliban bombs girls' schools and why those who have sex outside of



marriage are stoned to death: to keep women/girls in their place – captive, covered, segregated, disappeared, not seen and not heard.

Whilst women and men often resist these anti-women rules at great risk to themselves across the Middle East, Asia and North Africa (and might I add also in the west), the likes of Universities UK (UUK) and Islamism's apologists defend misogyny as a culturally relative 'right to religion'.

If anything, however, can be learnt from the recent fight (and small victory) against the endorsement of sex segregation at UK universities, it is that gender

"Like racial apartheid in South Africa, gender apartheid is segregation based on the inequities between genders. The 'logic' behind it is that women are not equal but 'complementary' to men and, if unveiled and un-segregated, are a source of fitnah and affliction in society. Whilst this perspective is debasing to women, it's also demeaning to men who are seen to be unable to control their sexual urges."



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segregation has nothing to do with the right to religion; after all ordinary Muslims (not a homogeneous group by any means) manage to go about their lives whilst freely mixing with the opposite sex all the time (and where mixing is banned, spend much of their time getting round segregation).

Gender apartheid is an Islamist demand to increase power and influence by asserting medieval rules on women and the society at large. The groups lined up to defend UUK’s indefensible position are all hard-core Islamists who hide behind ‘Muslim’ and religion to push forward their regressive and misogynist far-Right politics: Hizb Ut-Tahrir, FOSIS (Federation of Student Islamic Societies), Islamic Education and Research Academy (iERA), and Islamic Human Rights Commission...

FOSIS, for example, has just had their winter council in December with Kamal El Mekki a speaker who supports death for apostates. Hizb-Ut-Tahrir says gays should be killed and has been classified as a hate group. iERA’s Abdurraheem Green says disobedient women should be beaten; iERA won’t even publish on their website the photos of their women speakers (for women-only events of course)... The British jihadi Iftikhar Jaman who recently died in Syria fighting for Al-Qaeda affiliate ISIS was part of iERA’s dawah team...

The irony of such groups defending sex apartheid out of concern for ‘women’s comfort’ is lost on the likes of UUK.

As is the fact that Islamists have supporters amongst women. Having women supporters who are pro-gender apartheid doesn’t make segregation of the sexes pro-woman just like having black South Africans

defending separate homelands for black people doesn’t make Bantustans pro-equality. Just like having a Sikh spokesperson for the English Defence League doesn’t make that organisation anti-racist...

A 20 December meeting entitled ‘A Muslim Women’s Unified Community Response: The attack on gender segregation in Islam’ in London shows that in fact segregation is the Islamist women’s demand (whilst feigning representation of all Muslim women). Per Islamist rules, the meeting is women-only because women are not allowed to address men; their very voices will cause fitnah if heard by men, which also explains why women must write their questions down at meetings rather than voice them. Speakers at this women-only event are from Hizb-Ut-Tahrir, iERA, Islamic Human Rights Commission, and University Islamic Societies. Another speaker is Yvonne Ridley who used to work for the Islamic regime of Iran’s Press TV. Her former employer has also waded into the debate with a Member of the Islamic Assembly saying sex segregation has gotten attention in non-Islamic countries because universities in the west are ‘swamps of corruption’ and ‘Muslim students’ are in a position to influence and act as role models for non-Muslims...

Of course it is not just Universities UK. Whilst many got it right this time around and opposed UUK’s position that sex segregation is a deeply-held religious belief (sadly only because they see it as ‘their universities’ and not a Sharia court or burqa which only affects ‘the Other’), many – including the British government - have got it wrong countless times before.

Which is why UUK thought it could get away with endorsing gender apartheid and why Islamists can dare to speak of ‘women’s comfort’ whilst simultaneously waging an all-out war on women.

“Having women supporters who are pro-gender apartheid doesn't make segregation of the sexes pro-woman just like having black South Africans defending separate homelands for black people doesn't makes Bantustans pro-equality. Just like having a Sikh spokesperson for the English Defence League doesn't makes that organisation anti-racist..”

In other equally important fights against other aspects of the Islamist project to increase influence and power, there have been many, including humanists and secularists, who have defended Sharia courts as 'people's right to religion' and the burqa and niqab as 'women's right to clothing'.

But as Algerian sociologist Marieme Helie Lucas says: "There is an ideological battle going on, as well as very concrete ones. Introducing parallel legal systems, making one's political presence visible thanks to more and more women wearing a so-called 'Islamic dress', gender segregation, the revival of medieval forms of punishment such as beheading (let's not forget it happened in Woolwich not so long ago) or stoning or flogging or amputation of limbs - all this does not come in a vacuum. There is a correlation between all these demands; and there is a deliberate political will behind it."

The demand for gender segregation like Sharia courts and the niqab help Islamists gain political ground at the expense of the innumerable, including many Muslims who are Islamism's first victims.

The only way to stop Islamists from gaining more ground and in order to push them back, 'progressives' must begin to recognise this far-Right movement for what it is, defend universality and secularism, and fight it politically on all fronts in solidarity with the many women and men battling it from Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia to Iran.

La lucha continua (the fight continues)...

.....



letters to the editor

Having naked women on your cover is offensive and pornographic

N. Abraham

Having naked women on many of your covers daubed in slogans does not empower me - it reminds me of page three models who are said to be exploited by men/media. It feeds into western ideals that twerking is good, in my opinion, and loses the message these girls are trying to make (except look at her body; she wants to be a porn star. And I am not religious - yes we get that! It is also a bit clichéd). Much better to put Iman from a Vogue fashion shoot on the front - that would make a point without nudity (assuming you chose the right photo!) Also, having naked women half draped in the Muslim women's covering showing their nude parts is offensive and belittles the women who choose to cover up...! I find this offensive. Women have the right to cover up or not. Your pictures and not just one, encourages pornographic imagery and the consequences of that - you saying these women want to be part of this industry under their burkas. I am not a feminist as defined by some people but a woman and this is my opinion.

A Woman's Body Is Not Obscene; Veiling It Is.

Maryam Namazie responds

Whilst Islamists often portray their vile politics as a prescription for the debasement of women in western societies (i.e. against the Sun's page 3), their image of women is very much the same as the pornographic one. It reveals a deep-seated disdain for female nudity not very different from the tabloids and rooted in the religious/Islamist point of view.

Clearly, when you are faced with an Islamic movement that considers you to be worth half of a man and demands that you be bound, gagged, veiled, and segregated, then nudity becomes an important form of resistance and dissent as well as solidarity.

Nudity is the antithesis of veiling. Of course it is not the only way to resist Islamism and the veil but it is a very modern way of doing so. Islamists want us covered up, hidden, and not seen and not heard;

we refuse to comply.

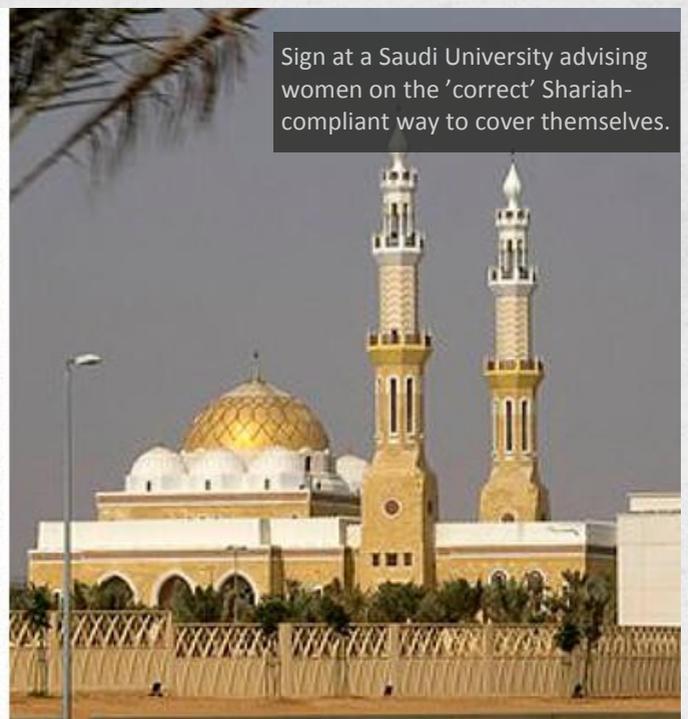
But nudity is not just a protest against Islamism and religious misogyny. It is fundamentally a protest against discrimination, the commodification of women, and the religious and chauvinistic culture built upon it – which is why it is on the increase and has been a part of the women's liberation movement for some time.

Commodification relies on an objectified image that is separate from the reality of women's bodies, minds and lives. This image is used to regulate, control and suppress. And this is what religion and pornography share, albeit in different forms. The actuality and frankness of women's bodies as a form of protest challenges and upsets both. Nudity outrages and offends because of this very challenge.

What makes nudity radical and progressive is also that it gives a practical response. And it is taboo-breaking in the most progressive sense of the word since progress often comes as a result of offending deeply held and misogynist views and sensibilities.

And nudity as a form of protest is relevant everywhere since male chauvinism and the commodification of women is deeply-rooted everywhere. Even in a majority of western countries, women still cannot appear topless in beaches or parks as can men. Breastfeeding in many public places is considered taboo. This gives the nude protests universal significance. Nude protest addresses deep-rooted discrimination against women.

A woman's body isn't obscene; veiling it is.



our campaigns

FIGHTING GENDER APARTHEID

More than a 100 protestors rallied outside the office of Universities UK (UUK) to condemn their endorsement of segregation of the sexes and demand gender equality on 10 December 2013, International Human Rights Day. The rally was organised by Fitnah – Movement for Women’s Liberation, One Law for All and London School of Economics Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society.

The protest was in response to guidance issued by Universities UK (UUK) (a body representing UK universities) which said that external speakers can ask for segregation between women and men and it wouldn’t be discriminatory as long as “both men and women are being treated equally, as they are both being segregated in the same way.” They also said that refusing to segregate the hall may curtail the speakers’ freedom of expression! The rally quickly followed an open letter signed by well-known personalities such as scientist Richard Dawkins and Music Producer Deeyah Khan condemning the endorsement of gender apartheid by Universities UK. The letter said that any form of segregation, whether by race, sex or otherwise is discriminatory. Separate is never equal and segregation is never applied to those who are considered equal. A petition opposing sex apartheid followed which has until now gathered over 9,000 signatories.



At the rally, **Pragna Patel**, director of Southall Black Sisters, said:

“For me, today is a particularly emotional moment. I stand here reminded of the heroic struggle waged against racial apartheid in South Africa, and yet find myself protesting against another form of apartheid that is also being justified with reference to that ubiquitous but flawed logic ‘separate but equal’. Who would have thought that in the 21st century, we would be protesting against policies adopted by institutions that should be in the business of producing and nurturing truth and knowledge, but which are instead endorsing the subjugation of one half of the human race? Who would have thought that in the 21st century, gender apartheid would become the new battleground?”

Maryam Namazie, co-organiser of the protest and Spokesperson for Fitnah and One Law for All added:

“Whilst people have an absolute right to their beliefs, they don’t have the right to manifest it when harmful or impose it on others, particularly not in a

public space such as a university. Also, it is important to remember that Muslims are not a homogeneous group (many oppose sex apartheid) and gender segregation is a demand of the far-Right Islamist movement. It is ironic that whilst sex apartheid is challenged the world over, including by many Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa, UUK insists on endorsing it here. UUK must rescind its guidance immediately.”

Comedian **Kate Smurthwaite** said:

“The word equality has only one meaning. It’s not the back of the bus and it’s not the side of the lecture theatre. This is not about telling women who want to sit separately that they can’t. This is about allowing external speakers to demand that the audience be segregated.”

James Bloodworth, editor of Left Foot Forward, said:

“Opposition to gender segregation is an issue of fundamental freedom: people should be permitted to sit with who they like in a publically funded

university. It's also a question of politics, though: we shouldn't pretend that those who wish to segregate men and women view us as equals. They don't. They think women are little more than a temptation to men; and they view men as uncontrollable predators whose view of women is on a par with that of uncovered meat."

Marieme Helie Lucas, a founder of Women Living Under Muslim Laws and Secularism is a Women's Issue sent a solidarity message saying:

"By bending to the Muslim Far-Right's supposedly-religious diktats of segregating sexes on university premises, UUK also endangers further the women and men of Muslim descent - believers and unbelievers alike - who stand both against fundamentalism and against xenophobia and discrimination, in increasingly difficult circumstances."

In another message of solidarity, Human Rights Campaigner **Peter Tatchell** said:

"Gender apartheid is as abhorrent as race apartheid. The people who approved this policy are unfit to hold any public office - and should resign. Universities once pioneered the Enlightenment and liberal, progressive values. Now, it seems, they appease misogyny and cave in to religious sexism and intolerance. The right of women and men to sit where they like is not negotiable."

Other speakers at the rally included: Ahlam Akram, director of Basira; Charlie Klendjian, secretary of the Lawyers' Secular Society; Georgi Laag, founder of London Atheist Activist Group; Sean Oakley, founder and former president of Atheist, Humanist and Secularist society; Helen Palmer, chair of the Central London Humanist Group; Abhishek Phadnis, President of the LSE Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society; Erin Saltman, Research Project Officer at Quilliam Foundation; and Anne-Marie Waters, Council Member of the National Secular Society. Taj Hargey, director of the Muslim Educational Centre at Oxford and an Imam at the Oxford Islamic Congregation was one of those who sent messages of solidarity.

Soon after the rally, which received widespread coverage, including when Prime Minister David Cameron intervened to oppose sex segregation at universities, UUK was forced to withdraw its guidance. Whilst this fight has been won, the battle continues particularly since sex segregation is still taking place at universities and UUK has said it hopes to redraft the guidance.

The Campaign against Gender Segregation at UK Universities will continue to press on until it is made very clear that there is no room for segregation of the sexes in public places like universities, including by organising teams of sex apartheid busters to break up gender apartheid at universities and hold a huge march against sex apartheid on 8 March 2014, International Women's Day. We are also getting legal advice.



Linked below is some of the media coverage on our campaign:

Gender segregation guidelines u-turn following PM warning, Channel 4 News, 13 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Universities pull back from sex segregation as Cameron weighs in, Daily Telegraph, 13 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

On the niqab, Community Channel, 13 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Sexual apartheid: Is there any room for gender segregation, This Week, 12 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

A future labour government will 'not tolerate' gender segregation at our universities, Left Foot Forward, 12 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Outcry at 'gender apartheid' in new guidance for UK universities, The Independent, 11 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

University gender segregation 'violation of women's freedom', BBC, 11 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Backlash grows over university gender segregation guidelines, Daily Telegraph, 11 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Gender Apartheid is real in UK universities so why aren't more people fighting it? Daily Telegraph, 11 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

'We will fight them like the suffragettes': Protesters target Universities UK over sex segregation policy, Politics, 11 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

The segregation of women and the appeasement of bigotry at UK's universities, The Spectator, 11 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Sex apartheid in British universities deemed

acceptable, Voice of Russia, 11 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Gender Segregation protests against university guidelines, Channel 4 News, 10 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Why we are protesting against gender segregation this evening, Left Foot Forward, 10 December 2013 [\[link\]](#)

Sex segregation at university debates is not okay, Care2, 30 November 2013 [\[link\]](#)



Iran legalised paedophilia.

Join the fight to protect the children.



Photo: Pavel P./Flickr (unaffiliated)

TWEET: #Iran #No2LegalPaedophilia

SIGN: http://www.avaaz.org/en/petition/An_end_to_legalised_paedophilia_and_child_rape_in_Iran/

CONDEMN LEGALISED PAEDOPHILIA AND CHILD RAPE IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Fitnah – Movement for Women’s Liberation and Children First Now unequivocally condemn legalised paedophilia. This law, like many other laws in the Islamic regime of Iran, violates the dignity and rights of children. And it must be stopped.

If you haven’t already signed our [petition](#), please join the over 9,500 others who have and do it now. Also forward it to 10 friends or acquaintances and Tweet against the law: #Iran #No2LegalPaedophilia. You can also write to Ali Khamenei, Iran’s Leader, info_leader@leader.ir, Twitter: @khamenei_ir or to Hassan Rouhani, President, media@rouhani.ir, Twitter: @hassanrouhani demanding an end to child rape and paedophilia.

Tweet against the law:

#Iran #No2LegalPaedophilia

Sign our petition and forward it to 10 friends or acquaintances.

Write to Ali Khamenei, Iran’s Leader, info_leader@leader.ir, Twitter: @khamenei_ir or to Hassan Rouhani, President, media@rouhani.ir, Twitter: @hassanrouhani demanding an end to child rape and paedophilia.

Publicise the campaign on social media including by changing your Facebook profile change to our campaign poster.

Do an act of solidarity on the internet, in your city square, at work, at your university in support of children’s rights and against the law.

letters to the editor

Send questions and comments to fitnah.movement@gmail.com and we will respond in the next issue of the publication.

contact us

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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:
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