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SECULARISM IS A HUMAN RIGHT.

Interview with AC Grayling

The below is a [Bread and Roses TV](#) interview broadcast via New Channel TV on 20 May 2014:

Maryam Namazie: *What is secularism and what is the value of secularism for both believers and non-believers?*

AC Grayling: Firstly let me say it's a great pleasure to be with you as I'm a big admirer of what you do. Secularism has to be distinguished from atheism and from other isms, like for example, humanism, which are naturally associated with it.

Most people who are atheists are probably likely to be secularists, but there are religious secularists as well, because secularism is a view about the place of religion - the religious voice, the religious organisations - in the public square, as this impacts for example, public policy matters. And the idea behind secularism is that the public square of society should be neutral with respect to all the different belief systems or to no belief systems. That what people believe in their private lives and in their religious commitments is not relevant to the public debate other than as a special interest point of view.

I think it is a very important point that religious organisations and movements should recognise themselves as interest groups, lobby groups: they have a point of view, of course they want to put their point of view in public debate, but they should take their turn in the queue with everybody else - other NGOs, political parties, pressure groups, lobby groups - whereas of course for historical reasons, in many societies, religion has a massively inflated presence in the public square. It is given charitable status, it is given a seat at the top table, and is heard first by people in positions of temporal power and that, I think, is where things have gone so wrong in our world.

Maryam Namazie: *On the issues of neutrality, some might say that the very fact that a secularist state demands that religion stays out of the public space, means that it is not really neutral, because it's giving a sort of negative viewpoint on religion. That it's not a good thing to be in the public space.*



AC Grayling: It certainly is a view which has been of course developed from the enlightenment thinking, about how individuals living together in a society can best flourish. So in that sense it is a positive view about allowing all sorts of different viewpoints, all sorts of different beliefs, and no beliefs, to coexist peacefully side by side. Not privileging any one of them, and not therefore coercing others, either to believe or to not believe. So in that sense it is a positive view. But the heart of it, the essence of it is neutrality with respect to these different viewpoints. That is, you allow people to have a belief and to practice that belief, providing it does not impact negatively on other people. But also, and very, very importantly, it allows people who have no religious commitment - who are atheists, who are agnostics, who don't belong to a church or a religious movement - to live without the coercion or pressure, or a social 'bad odour', that used to be the case, and in some societies remains the case.

Maryam Namazie: *You mention the fact that there can be believers who are secularists but can religion, can Islam, be compatible with secularism?*

AC Grayling: Well this is a very interesting question about Islam because it would seem to be in the very nature of Islam that a secular society is impossible because Islam pervades every aspect of life. It is not just a religion; it is a social end and is in many ways a political philosophy as well. Of course nowadays people use the term Islamism to mean political Islam.

But Islam is so all embracing. It permeates the lives and thoughts of people from the very earliest memories of their lives, all the way up through their education, and the presence of the religion's demand on, or offer to, people is there every few hours when the muezzin cries from the mosque. So it's very hard even to imagine a translation of the English word 'secularism' into Farsi or Arabic, which doesn't have a negative connotation.

The origin of secularism in Christian countries is a very interesting one. It was actually the church that first asked for separation of church and state, of belief from temporal matters, because they didn't want the state interfering in its business. Of course, it wanted to continue to interfere in the states business, so it was only a one-way change of relationship. But the idea of secularism started with the religious. And took many centuries actually before it was adopted by the genuinely secular wing of society, who said yes, we would like to be able to do science, education, discuss public policy matters, talk about the diversity and plurality in society and how we address it and satisfy all the competing needs in society, without having the distorting effect of a single religious outlook and that really is something that perhaps from the eighteenth century has been operative in western societies.

Maryam Namazie: *One of the things that we sometimes hear is that a theocracy, or an Islamic state, is just, it's fair, and it's needed for a moral society. The Islamic regime of Iran or Islamists will often say that a secular society is an immoral one.*

AC Grayling: Well it's a very tendentious thing to say; I mean, it's a party political view on the part of people who want, in a theocratic society, everybody to toe the line. It's sort of demonstrably a false view this, because a claim that there is a one size fits all answer to how people should live, what they should believe, how they should think, how they should behave. This completely ignores the great diversity and difference, the variety that there is in human nature, and human interests and needs.

People sometimes talk about what's called the golden rule in some cultures: do to others as you would have them do to you. But that makes you the standard for every one of the 7 billion people on the planet, which is an absurd view to take. But if you really are going to be a good neighbour to your fellows in society, you should be

thoughtful about the differences in their individuality. And recognise that a society is a plural domain. In fact the very concept of pluralism is, I think, an uncomfortable one for Muslim thinkers because the homogeneity of society, the fact that everybody believes together, that it's just one big group with a shared outlook, is of the very essence of what an Islamic society should be like.

Maryam Namazie: *Some will say that secularism calls for religion being a private matter and Islam isn't a private matter. It's a public matter. Secularism, they would say, violates the right to religion.*

AC Grayling: Well, the key thing is that Islam regards itself as a public religion. Interestingly this keeps alive something that pre-existed the rise both of Christianity and of Islam, because religion in the classical world was not a private matter; it was a public matter. What Islam has done is to combine the idea of the private aspect of it, your personal responsibility to Allah, but at the same time regard it as something which completely unifies and homogenises society; makes everyone march in the same direction and at the same pace. So, it's an interesting hybrid of the most ancient forms of religion, and the new young religious outlook, which is represented by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition.

My response is to say that the demand that the beliefs and practices of the religion are a public matter, that it's a public duty of each individual member of a society to be observant of the religion, to follow its code, its practices - even what you eat and what you wear, and women covering their hair - that this is a demand which very fundamentally violates the individual rights of people to self determination, to liberty of conscience, to choices about how they are going live and what they are going to believe. And it

"The idea behind secularism is that the public square of society should be neutral with respect to all the different belief systems or to no belief systems... Not privileging any one of them, and not therefore coercing others, either to believe or to not believe.

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closes down so many human opportunities, so many human possibilities, that if everybody has to think just one way, believe and practice just one way, it's going to shut out an enormous range of possibilities on the horizon of human life.

Maryam Namazie: *So you wouldn't agree with the idea that secularism is a western concept?*

AC Grayling: Secularism is not a western concept actually, because, you look at India, there are very ancient and deep atheist traditions of thought, which imply therefore that society should be a non-religious domain. If you look at China, now here's a tremendous generalisation about one sixth of humanity, but the Chinese can be very superstitious people, but they are not a religious people. They've never had a God, a deity who issues commands and so on. They talk about the concept of 'Tian' - of heaven and the way of heaven - but that's a bit like the stoic philosophers of ancient times who talked about the logos, the principal of things. So very large numbers of human beings have never had an idea that there is a god who is like an emperor or a king in the sky, who issues orders and everybody's got to obey. And as a result, of course, by default, the view about the nature of society is a secularist view - not given that name, maybe, but in functional terms, that's what it implies. So it isn't an exclusively western idea but as we think and discuss about secularism now, it is of course an idea which is being given a great deal of impetus by the European enlightenment of the eighteenth century. So in that sense the idea was revived and was given more 'juice' if you like, by the debates in the enlightenment. And it has therefore been a very potent idea in the development of western societies. The growth of science, the technological developments, the building of institutions of law and democracy have all been

“Actually the appearance of religious revivalism is a symptom of religious decline. And the empirical data supports this analysis.”

associated with the secularist impulse that we get from the early modern period.

Maryam Namazie: *Would you agree with those (I would think you wouldn't) who say that as a result of the religious "revival" (they call it) that we're living in a post-secular age, that secularism is no longer relevant?*

AC Grayling: No, I don't think that, because I have a very different analysis about what is happening in the world with respect to religion. I think that in the last decade, or couple of decades anywhere in the western world, the pressure on religion and religious organisations that comes from the decline of religious observance, because there is a steep and increasing decline of religious commitment in the west. And this makes the people who have a zealous religious commitment anxious. So they raise the volume. They raise the activism. And it makes it look as though there's more religion, but actually there's just more noise from an increasingly smaller group of people. It's a bit like if you corner an animal in a room, it will make a big noise, where it would have been more peaceful before. So actually the appearance of religious revivalism is a symptom of religious decline. And the empirical data supports this analysis, because you look - even at the United States of America, which is thought to be a very religious country because of its Protestant Calvinistic origins in the seventeenth century, in fact, the Pew Centre polling data over the last 30 years has shown an increasingly steep decline in religious commitment. They have a - on their polling data - they have a box, which says 'none', so the people who tick this are known as "nones". You know, a bit like the nuns in church (that's quite funny). And the increase especially among the under 35s is very significant. And organisations in America, the American Atheist Association (the AAA), the American Humanist Association, the Secular Society in America, the Skeptic Society, they are all of them growing very fast and becoming much more vocal.

Maryam Namazie: *You're seeing that in the Middle East and North Africa as well - the rise of secularist and modern movements.*

AC Grayling: Well this is a remarkable and a very welcome thing because of course and a point I'd like to expand on in a moment is that freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, freedom of enquiry, these are absolutely fundamental human freedoms which are so important for the health of society and the health of humanity's future that the liberation of the human mind from ancient superstitions and ancient religions,

the liberation of children from indoctrination into religious views, which are either very difficult to get out of or which imprison them for the rest of their lives (in a certain view), these are crucial matters. This is why in this age of ours, where everybody's able to talk to everybody through a means of electronic media, this aspect of the conversation about our future, the future of humanity, is key. It seems to me that we're in a little bottleneck period now. And a last major player in this is Islam, and in particular, Islamism - that aspect of Islam which is perhaps nervous, frightened, feels threatened by the globalisation of western styles of secularism and you can imagine and you can even indeed sympathise with a very sincere Muslim father who's worried about what his daughters will do, and you can see the anxiety. But maybe it's his sons who are going to take some action, kick back at a way of living and looking at the world which they find inimical to them and which they find very threatening. So this makes us enter a little bottleneck - a dangerous period - where the people that have these deep commitments and who have become very angry, and anger sometimes turns into violence, and they do terrible things - they commit murder because they are afraid that other people do not share their beliefs. That's the passage of time we are going through. And we see societies, as in Iran for example, struggling. From outside Iran, when people look at what is happening there, this is an educated, mature society; many people there who would love to have the freedom to develop and to flourish, who are attracted by these ideas, these ideas are not western ideas, these are human ideas, they are ideas about human flourishing. And yet there's a regime and there's a powerful, influential group of people in the society who want to stop that. For people from outside, it has the feeling of the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Europe, when something very similar happened. And you do get people saying, and perhaps it's not a helpful thing to say, but you do get people drawing parallels. I'm talking about a stage of historical development. Personally I hope that's not true, because if it were true, then it's going to take another 300 years, and however long you and I live, Maryam, we're not going to get there.

Maryam Namazie: It's not going to take that long, I hope and I'm sure.

AC Grayling: I really, really hope not.

Maryam Namazie: You've argued that secularism is a human right. Why?

AC Grayling: It is, without any question, a human

right for people to be free of coercion, indoctrination, proselytization, of being obliged to act, dress, live and believe in ways that other people want to impose upon them.

Sometimes people say "oh well, so you're a secularist, you want to impose secularism on other people". And this is a very false argument; the secularist argument is "think what you like and believe what you like, but you have a duty to others not to harm them by your choices." That's a very simple statement, but it's a very deep statement and a very important point. In fact it was made by John Stuart Mill back in the nineteenth century in his wonderful essay "On Liberty", where he talked not only about the danger of political totalitarianism, but of social and attitudinal totalitarianism, and the kind of imposition on people's lives that come from belief systems where very zealous, very eager people want to force you to live in the way that they choose. It's a key fact about moralists, and religious zealots, that they say: "I think this, therefore you must do that". And that of course, you can see from just that example, it's a human right to be free from the pointed finger, and other people saying "you've got to live according to my beliefs and my choices". So, there should be, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights more emphasis placed on the thing that says liberty of belief and religious practice and conscience or none. And the "none" part should be taken very seriously. Because even in a society like the English society (I don't mean the UK society) no school child is free of religious instruction, of religious practice, of prayers or hymns, or whatever it might be in schools. There are very few schools there where this is neutral. And you have to as a parent (as I've done with my own children) get an opt-out from these religious observances. It is so much like a great big oil tanker in the ocean to try and turn around people's views. Liberate the mind; free people. Let them choose for themselves. In a matter as important, or as unimportant as religion, let the people decide for themselves when they have the facts. Don't indoctrinate children! That seems to me to be a form of abuse, in fact, I will use that word, and it's a strong word, but it does seem to me to be a form of abuse.

AC Grayling is a British philosopher.

newsflash

AGHANISTAN



Photo: Reuters/Omar Sobhani

Nearly 100 women, accompanied by children, staged a [protest](#) rally in northern Faryab province, accusing a local commander of sexually abusing and murdering young girls and children during a bloody clash with civilians. They said the local warlord, Qader Rahmani, had subjected women and children to sexual harassment during the clash, asking the government to punish him and his armed supporters.

EGYPT

13-year-old [Soheir al-Batea](#) from a village in Egypt's Nile Delta died last June whilst being mutilated by Dr. Raslan Fadl, an imam and employee of the local government hospital who performed the illegal procedure as he had done on dozens of other girls.

This little girl's case, like many before her, would normally have been buried and forgotten. Since FGM was criminalized in Egypt in 2008, both parents and practitioners fearful of arrest have kept quiet when there are complications. But now, for the first time in Egyptian history, both Soheir's father and Dr. Fadl are to stand trial charged with illegally mutilating the child's genitals and with manslaughter. Egypt has one of the highest rates of



Photo: Reuters

FGM in the world: a staggering 91 per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have been cut, according to a 2013 report released by UNICEF. In recent years there have been at least five documented fatalities related to female genital mutilation in Egypt, some of which made international headlines. In 2007, it was the deaths of two other teenage girls that forced the Egyptian government to review the law and ban the practice. In 2010, Nermin El-Haddad, also 13, bled to death in a hospital after she was operated on. Yet until this year no case has ever made it to court.

INDIA

Joining the ranks of 'self-appointed' guardians of public morality, BJP's [Rajya Sabha](#) member and Madhya Pradesh party vice-president Raghunandan Sharma said girls shouldn't be allowed to use mobile phones before marriage and women shouldn't wear jeans.

[Abu Azmi](#), the state Samajwadi Party chief, who was deposed before the State Women's Commission to

clarify his remarks said "as per the teaching of Islam, women having illicit sex must be hanged, as sex is allowed only after marriage". On invoking Islam, Azmi cited constitutional right of freedom of speech that "allows citizens of India to propagate the teachings of their faith and religion". The commission chairperson said: "The India constitution provides equal rights to all women irrespective of their religion. The domestic violence Act protects all women, including those in a live-in relationship. Islamic rules can't be invoked to propagate one's opinion".

INDONESIA

A 25 year-old woman faces up to nine lashes with a wooden cane as punishment for "adultery" in the Langsa district of Aceh, [Indonesia](#). The woman has been gang-raped by eight men as punishment for her "offence" under local laws. On 1 May 2014, the group of men stormed the woman's home where she was allegedly having an affair with a married man. They tied up the couple and repeatedly raped the woman and beat the man. News reports indicate the couple



was then doused in raw sewage. Three of the attackers are now being held in custody. The others are still on the run.

IRAN



religious beliefs".

The uproar forced Hatami to seek to apologise to Iran's cinema organisation.

[Tasnim](#), a state-run news agency in Iran controlled and operated by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corp, interviewed Hadi Sharifi, a "media activist" who



Photo: Valery Hache/AFP/Getty Images/Canal+

Islamists reacted strongly to actress [Leila Hatami](#) kissing the director of the Cannes Film Festival, Gilles Jacob, whilst greeting him. She is the first Iranian woman to sit on the jury of the Cannes Film Festival. A group of female Iranian students with links to Iranian Revolutionary Guards wrote to Tehran's minister of culture and media, Ali Jannati, asking that "Hatami be sentenced to one to 10 years imprisonment and flogging". The group, Student Sisters of Hezbollah, cited article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code seeking punishment for Hatami kissing a non-Muslim man. The media branded the greeting as "an affront to the chastity of women in Iran". Iran's deputy culture minister, Hossein Noushabadi, expressed his disapproval saying, "Iranian woman is the symbol of chastity and innocence. Hatami's inappropriate presence at the festival was not in line with our

said that if women feel it is their right to show off their beauty, or appear any which way they desire in society, or reveal their beauty to men, then they should also consider the right of men to enjoy women. He attempted to explain that because it is natural and instinctual for a man to be drawn to the beauty of a woman and seek sex with her, it is a man's right to benefit from what he loves. Sharifi said that when a man forces himself onto a woman because she is "showing off her beauty", this [should not] be considered rape. Sharifi said since men have not granted women permission to show off their beauty, then men who become aroused by the "nakedness" of women do not need the permission of women to pursue their sexual urges.

A senior Iranian cleric, Mohammad Emami Kashani, Tehran's Friday prayer leader, called [divorce parties](#) a "satanic" Western import and a "poison". Kashani told worshippers that marriage is a sacred bond and that Western practices like divorce parties undermine family values. "Unfortunately, divorce parties are being organised as of recently... This is very dangerous. It's a poison for the Islamic civilization and society". "Men and women who hold divorce parties are definitely satanic," he added. Kashani urged young people to avoid adopting Western practices and to protect their local cultural achievements and traditions. "Disintegration of family and lechery are related to the disgraceful Western civilisation ... Western-style freedoms are wrong".

After international outrage at the arrest of six young Iranians for dancing to Pharrell Williams's song "[Happy](#)" in an Internet video, the Iranian government has released them on bail. The video's director, Sassan Soleimani, is still being detained. Police called the



video "obscene" and accused the youth of committing acts that would "hurt public chastity".

More than 300,000 people have supported the Facebook page "[Stealthy Freedoms of Women in Iran](#)" in which women posing bare-headed in various Iranian cities has posted their photos on the page. "This is me committing a crime", wrote a girl who posted an image of herself sitting in the middle of a secluded road in Nour Forest in northern Iran, with her headscarf resting on her shoulder. Another photo shows a grandmother, a mother and her daughter together on a pavement. "In one frame, three generations secure freedom at a corner of this street", read the caption. Last week, thousands of conservatives held a protest in Tehran, urging the government to confront what they say is the increasing flouting of the Islamic dress code.



After more than quarter of a century of struggle to raise awareness about the secret execution of their loved ones, [mothers of Khavaran](#), a grassroots network of thousands of survivors in Iran, received the 2014 Gwangju Prize for Human Rights.

NIGERIA



The more than [200 schoolgirls](#) kidnapped from their school in Nigeria by Boko Haram have been sighted for the first time and tracked to three camps in the north of Nigeria, near Lake Chad, 200 miles from where they were abducted. Abubakar Shekau, leader of Boko Haram, has threatened he will sell the girls into the sex trade or as wives unless the government frees Islamists that have been jailed. Boko Haram released a video two weeks ago showing some of the abducted girls in veils and reciting from the Qu'ran, and claimed they had converted to Islam.

SAUDI ARABIA

A 23-year-old [Filipino domestic servant](#) in Saudi Arabia suffered horrible burns recently when her boss tossed a scalding pot of water on her. The mother of the woman's employer was angry at her because she thought she was taking too long to make coffee. A Facebook post by the woman's cousin showed pictures of the burns and described what happened. The post says the woman, identified publicly as Fatma,

waited for over six hours before being taken the hospital following the incident. She is now in the custody of the Philippine Embassy, and says she wants file a case against her abusive employer.

A 17-year-old [Yemeni](#) wife committed suicide by hanging herself at her home in Saudi Arabia because of persistent abuses by her ageing Saudi husband. The woman was found hanging by a rope tied around her neck and to the ceiling fan at her house in the southern Saudi Abha town. Relatives said the women ended her life because of persistent abuses by her husband.

Sources at the ministry of Education said that health education is not [PE for girls](#), which has been opposed by conservatives. Female officials in the education sector have said that the book on health and female health education for girls is not related to sports per se, but addresses the importance of taking up sports to maintain public health. Staff will soon be trained on how to teach the new subject, which includes information on weight maintenance. "Physical



Photo: Mona Kareem

and partying on [Valentine's Day](#). Two defendants were sentenced to ten years in prison and 2,000 lashes to be given in 20 parts in front of Al Nafoora market. Two other defendants were handed seven years in prison and 1,500 public lashes each over 15 parts. The fifth defendant was given five years in jail and 1,000 public lashes. The men were arrested alongside six women in a house they had rented for recreational purposes in the city of Burayda, the capital of Al Qassim region in north central Saudi Arabia. The men admitted to charges of dancing, illicit relations

education has not been completely approved” said Khaled Hammad, official spokesman of the Education Directorate in the Eastern Province. “The subject has, however, been approved for boys within the new semester-based system”.

Five Saudi men have been sentenced to various jail terms and ordered to be lashed in public for drinking

with unrelated women and celebrating Valentine's Day. The five men will be barred from leaving the country for five years after serving their sentences in prison. The charges against the six women arrested during the raid will be reviewed by a different judge amid expectation that the verdict will be announced soon.



Photo: AFP

SUDAN



Photo: Times Newspapers

A Sudanese lawyer filed an appeal for a pregnant woman sentenced to death for apostasy for refusing to renounce her Christianity. The filing asks the appeals court to reverse the verdict by the lower court and free [Mariam Yahya Ibrahim](#), 27. Ibrahim, who is eight months pregnant, is in prison with her 20-month-old son. Ibrahim says her father was a Sudanese Muslim and her mother was Ethiopian Orthodox. Her father left when she was 6, and she was raised as a Christian. The court had warned her to renounce her Christianity by May 15, but she held firm to her beliefs. Sudanese Parliament speaker Fatih Izz Al-Deen said claims she was raised as non-Muslim are untrue. She was raised in an Islamic environment, and her brother, a Muslim, filed the complaint against her, according to Al-Deen. The complaint alleges that she went missing for several years, and her family was shocked to find out she married a Christian, according to her lawyer. However, because her father was Muslim, the courts considered her one too, which would mean her marriage to a non-Muslim man is

void. In addition to the death sentence, the court convicted her of adultery and sentenced her to 100 lashes.

SYRIA

A few thousand Euros are enough to buy [Syrian women](#), including minors, who have fled their war-torn country and are living in refugee camps, Arab human rights groups have denounced. The groups are sounding the alarm on the plight of women who are on sale as "Syrians up for marriage" on Facebook. This phenomenon is not new. Last year, reports alleged that Syrian women living in refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey and Iraq had been sold to men from Arab countries, in particular from the Gulf area. Rights groups also denounced cases of violence and sexual harassment in which victims were as young as 12 and 13 years of age. The Facebook page publicizing Syrian refugees who could be bought as wives was closed



Photo: Spencer Platt/Getty

climate of growing religious polarization. "You can marry legally or secretly", read the Facebook page.

YEMEN

The Yemeni government must expedite passage of a draft [Child Rights Law](#) establishing 18 as Yemen's minimum marriage age. On April 27, 2014, Legal Affairs Minister Mohammad Makhlafi submitted the

after hundreds of activists and human rights' lawyers protested. But it had thousands of followers between May 17-21 including prospective clients interested in the women who were portrayed with little on. Some posts showed the picture of women "looking for a husband" with a brief profile on their chastity and their ability in domestic work. According to Arab NGO Kafa, which has repeatedly denounced the phenomenon, clients mostly hail from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, as well as Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Yemen and Bahrain. Among the announcements was one publicizing "refugee girls of all ages and religious confessions" to satisfy all applications from Sunnis, Shiites and Christians in a

proposed law to Prime Minister Mohammad Basindawa, who should ensure a cabinet review and submit it to parliament for prompt passage. Some 52 percent of Yemeni girls are married – often to much older men – before age 18, and 14 percent before age 15, according to United Nations and Yemeni government data from 2006. Girls who marry young often drop out of school, are more likely to die in childbirth, and face a higher risk of physical and sexual abuse than women who marry at 18 or later. Girls who do not want to marry are often forced to do so by their families. Yemen is one of the few countries in the region now without any legal minimum age for marriage.



Photo: Former child-bride Nujud Mohammed Ali via CNN

MOHAMMED HUWARI/AFP/Getty Images

Hijab Girl: Unveiled - by Sarah Alhazmi

A new comic book series "[Hijab Girl: Unveiled](#)" by author and illustrator Sarah Alhazmi, a Saudi youth currently residing in Dubai is a social and political statement on the role of women in Saudi society. Hijab Girl, the series' protagonist, is a young girl living in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi Gazette reports: In the opening pages, she is hit by a car owned by an affluent member of society who mistakes her for a garbage bag. After surviving the accident, Hijab Girl meets Fady, a young boy who is convinced Hijab Girl is a superhero after the car hurtles her through the air and she lands in a pair of green underpants.

On the difficulties she faced in releasing *Hijab Girl: Unveiled*, Alhazmi said: "Many regional publishing companies have refused to publish it because they don't want to risk upsetting the powers that be. However at the Middle East Film and Comic Con (an annual event in Dubai that celebrates the comic book medium) where I released *Hijab Girl*, it was met really well.

"The thing about my comic is that many people see the cover and initially think it is an attack on their beliefs, but once they begin to read it, they are usually on board.

"I find it extraordinarily satisfying when someone picks up my comic thinking that they will be offended only to completely change their opinion midway through reading," said Alhazmi on the readiness of the public to treat their issues with humor and laughter.

The art style and themes in *Hijab Girl* make use of slapstick comedy and cartoony illustrations to drive a strong message. "Approaching such a serious topic in a lighter 'whimsical' style makes the subject more approachable and less preachy, while still delivering its meaningful message," Alhazmi said.



Some of her concepts are quite unique, such as Alhazmi's business card, which looks like a faux drivers' license, complete with a veiled mug shot revealing only Hijab Girl's eyes that seem to hint at an agreeable attitude, masking very real – and justified – frustration. "Handing out my card, I usually say 'we make our own.' People laugh and pray for a better future. Some will ask for one of their own, others will condescendingly say 'in your dreams sister.'"

upcoming events



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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.

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The Religious Right, Secularism & Civil Rights

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SINGLE ADMISSION

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

UNWAGED £50

WAGED £60

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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

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editorial

A FEMALE EARTHQUAKE "BY STEALTH"!

MARYAM NAMAZIE

Tehran's Interim Friday Prayers Leader Hojjatoeslam Kazem Sedighi recently [said](#): *"In certain towns and cities, some have been seen to have removed their headscarves. This lack of hijab has infiltrated homes via internet and satellite TV..."*

Hadi Sharifi, a "media activist" interviewed by [Tasnim](#), a state-run news agency in Iran controlled and operated by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corp, has said when a man forces himself onto a woman because she is "showing off her beauty", this should not be considered rape because it is natural and instinctual for a man to be drawn to the beauty of a woman and seek sex with her. Since men have not granted women permission to show off their beauty, then men who become aroused by the "nakedness" of women do not need the permission of women to pursue their sexual urges...

Recently, too, thousands held a protest in Tehran, urging the Islamic regime to confront what they say is the increasing flouting of the Islamic dress code.

Clearly, the [Stealthy Freedom](#) Facebook page, where women in Iran are posting unveiled photos of themselves despite the compulsory veiling law



has hit a nerve with the regime and its apologists. And rightly so. The veil is an important symbol of the regime. One of the first things Islamists did after expropriating the Iranian revolution was to impose compulsory veiling. The slogan of their thugs attacking women protesters was “either veil or a smack” (ya rusary ya tusary).

Throughout its 35 year rule, women have challenged the regime’s compulsory veiling law by transgressing them; improper or “bad” veiling has always been a form of resistance to the regime despite the morality police’s constant harassment, and risks of fines or imprisonment.

The unveiling of women, however, in broad daylight, for all the world to see is an even more fundamental challenge to the regime and its rule.



Photo: Hadi Hirbodvash

Fars News Agency

The unveiled woman is the beginning of the end of the regime. A female revolution has long been in the making and it is this movement that will bring the regime to its knees. And not a day too soon.

آزادی های یوانتنگی زنان در ایران Stealthy Freedoms of Iranian Women

#آزادی یواشکی
#My Stealthy Freedom



our campaigns

REYHANEH JABBARI'S STAY OF EXECUTION WE MUST KEEP THE PRESSURE ON



her. She was forced to confess under torture and threats to her family. She has suffered unbearable mistreatment in the hands of a system that has been insistent on sending a young girl to the gallows until now.

Reyhaneh has lived under the shadow of death for far too long. She must be immediately released and any charges against her quashed.

To find out more about her case and help keep the pressure on, and join over 200,000 people who have signed a [petition](#) calling for Reyhaneh's freedom and an end to her execution.

Reyhaneh Jabbari's lawyer, Mohammad Ali Jadari Foroghi, has said that Reyhaneh's name has been removed from the execution list and her file is scheduled for review. The worldwide protest in support of Reyhaneh has forced a review of her case and brought the unfair and corrupt judiciary system of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the attention of international public opinion.

26 year old Reyhaneh Jabbari has been in prison for the past 7 years for stabbing a man attempting to rape



عکس کودکی ریحاته یا خواهران کوچکترش

letters to the editor

Send questions and comments to 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.*



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