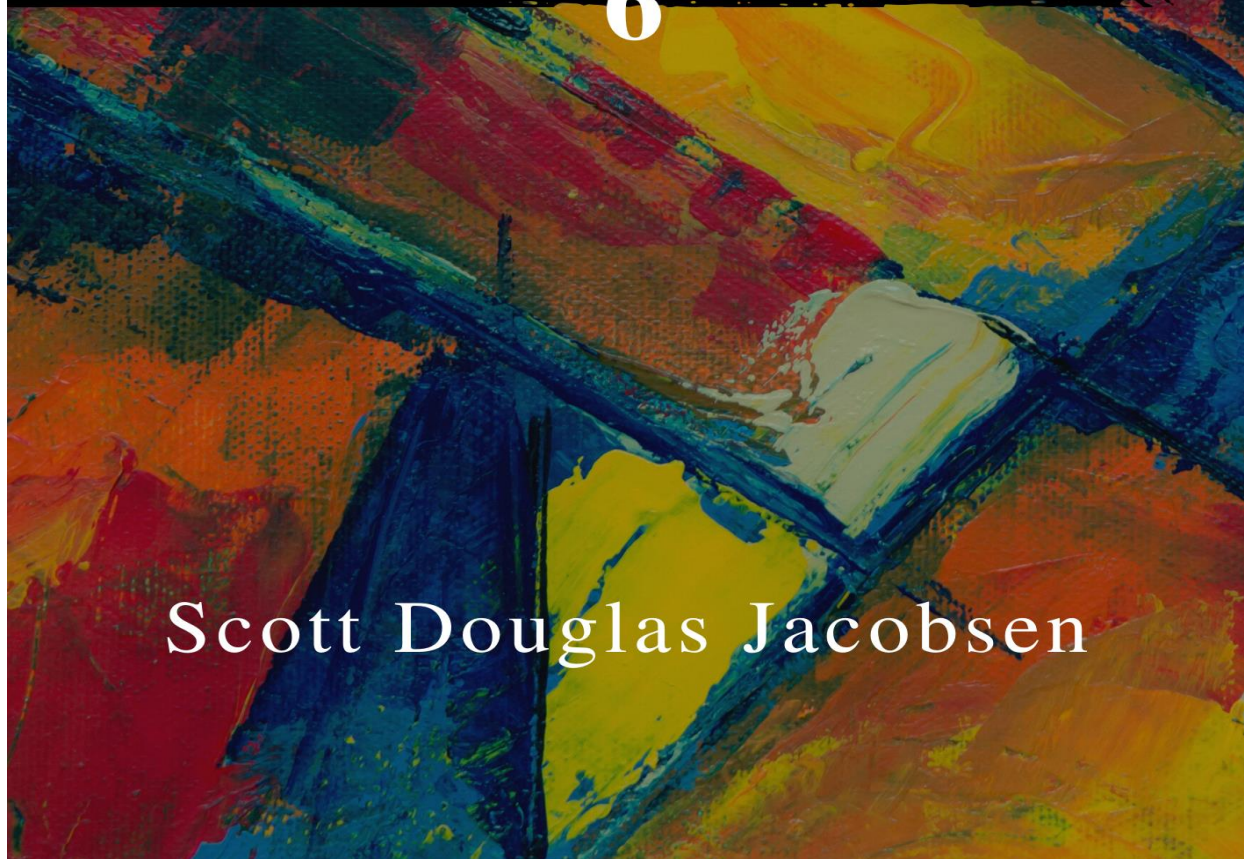


# BOOK OF STUFF

6



Scott Douglas Jacobsen

# In-Sight Publishing

## **Book of Stuff 6**

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## **MEDIUM (PERSONAL)**



# Yasmine Mohammed on Free Hearts, Free Minds

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 1, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What does this organization mean to you?**

**Yasmine Mohammed:** I was getting inundated with messages from people from the Muslim world asking for help. I tried as hard as I could, but I didn't have the resources to help them all. I was frustrated and sad and it was starting to affect my life and my mental health.

Because I related so much to the stories I was hearing, it was hard to separate myself. I kept thinking of how I felt when I was going through what they're going through. And in many ways, because I was in a free, secular country — even as bad as it was for me, it was a walk in the park compared to what people in the Islamic world have to endure. Rather than wallow in feelings helplessness, frustration and sadness, I decided to start FreeHearts, Free Minds.

Starting FHFM feels like I'm reaching back 10–15 years and helping my confused, lonely, petrified, and to be honest, suicidal young self. If social media had even been available for me—had I known that leaving Islam was even an option—I wouldn't have suffered nearly as much as I did. Today, with the help of technology, and FHFM, I want to do all I can to ensure that no one ever feels that alone.

**Jacobsen: What are the scale and scope of the organization at present and into the next 3 years?**

**Mohammed:** FHFM is not even a year old yet, but we have managed to do so much in so little time. I now have a team of ten people working with me. And we are prepared to launch a dating site that will support Ex-Muslims in the Muslim world trying to avoid forced marriages and/or circumvent guardianship laws. We're just a few months old, but we're expanding our services already! Who knows what could happen within the next three years? If we're able to maintain and grow our two services, I'll be happy. I think both services provide essential support to apostates in Islamic countries in very dangerous situations who have no other resources, no other options, and no other hope.

**Jacobsen: Where can ex-Muslims connect with the organization or others to find assistance, guidance, community, and safety?**

**Mohammed:** There are lots of online support groups out there, but unfortunately they're all localized, so an individual would have to search for a group in their region. As far as North America, they could join EXMNA or Muslimish. There are some groups scattered around Europe as well. Because of safety concerns, it's not as easy to find groups in the Islamic world. That's where FHFM comes in. It supports ppl in the Islamic world because they are in the most dire need. Even if they were to find a local private Facebook group or something, they'd be too afraid to share any personal info. They know they can trust us.

**Jacobsen: How can everyone donate skills, time, money, experience, and connections to the organization?**

**Mohammed:** If you are able to help, please go to [www.freeheartsfreeminds.com](http://www.freeheartsfreeminds.com) and support us monthly through Patreon or GoFundMe. We currently have a growing waiting list of people

looking for one-on-one support from a Life Coach. The list grows, on average, about a person per week.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Yasmine.**

# Creationism and Evolution — Bill HB258 Denied

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 1, 2018

This bill would enable public school teachers who teach kindergarten through 12th grade to include, as a portion of instruction regarding the scientific origins of man and the Earth, instruction regarding the Biblical theory of creation, so long as evolution is also taught. This bill would further allow any teacher who desires to instruct students regarding the Biblical theory of creation to read passages from the Bible in class which he or she deems necessary to propel the instruction forward. This bill would allow a student receiving instruction on both the Biblical theory of creation and evolution to make a determination as to which theory to accept. A student would be permitted credit on course exams if he or she chooses to adhere to the Biblical theory of creation instead of evolution and then answers exam questions according to that system of belief.

The United States of America state of Alabama attempted to pass a bill for the teaching of creationism. The curricula would include creationism alongside evolution. Creationism tends to come in three forms.

One is Young Earth Creationism with the world, humans, and everything in it no older than 10,000 years. Some room for variation in the age. Another group is Old Earth Creationist. Those who believe everything got divinely breathed into life by God. Big difference is the age factor, hence “Old.”

They believe in the 4.54-billion-year-old Earth. Same assertion but also partial acceptance of the evidence. The main inspiration coming from the Bible plus acceptance of modern geology but not modern biology.

Another is Intelligent Design. Often, unfairly, it gets lumped with Old Earth Creationism and Young Earth Creationism with the media portrayals as “Creationism.”

It amounts to, in one view, in part a religious argument and, in another view, in part an information-based argument with the research programme oriented towards detection of design in nature through, for example, finding irreducible complexity.

Each of the three have nuances. However, the general critique stands because all three as strands stand in part or whole against modern unguided biological evolution accepted by the vast majority of practicing biologists for the explanation of the development, growth, and speciation of species.

Modern biological evolution remains unguided. Some choose to assert a Theistic Evolution view. God used evolution to create “Mankind,” in essence. The majority of practicing biologists, especially the elite ones, accept unguided evolution. It becomes the bedrock for modern biological sciences, so one foundation for modern medicine too.

In a sociological analysis of the groups, these seem to have similar problems as the New Atheist movement. The Intelligent Design demographics seem, for the most part, to be white Christian males with a sprinkling of an atheist or agnostic in the mix.

The New Atheist demographics lean heavily towards white males with some ex-Muslims males. However, the majority remain white males. In Alabama’s House, Bill 258 was not accepted. It would teach creation theory as interpreted and asserted through the Bible to students.

This battle continues back as a war for decades, especially in the school system. Some religious parents resent public schools for teaching modern evolutionary theory to their children.

They would prefer creationism taught to their children. Because the literalist interpretation of their religious holy text and community demands it. The bill, Bill 258 in the Alabama House, “died in committee on March 29, 2018.

The legislature adjourned *sine die* to the benefit of standard biological sciences curricula. Kentucky Revised Statutes 158.177 was a Kentucky law used to create the HB 258 bill.

158.177 was enacted in 1976. It is noted by NCSE as unconstitutional. Steve Hurst (R-District 35) was the sole supporter. Hurst has been known for “previous proposals to require public school teachers to read a daily prayer in the classroom and to punish sex offenders with surgical or chemical castration.”

*Writing at PLoS’s SciComm blog (February 19, 2018), Amanda Glaze — a native of Alabama now teaching at Georgia Southern University — decried HB 258, arguing, “Legislation that conflates empirical scientific evidence with evidence derived from religious texts can seriously harm efforts to improve science literacy.”*

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# Singularities, What is Inside a Black Hole and Behind the Big Bang?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 1, 2018

*Sunday Express* reported on the possibility for research in standard Big Bang cosmology into areas before not empirically researched. That point being before the singularity at the moment of creation or the Big Bang as it is sometimes called.

It has been notoriously thought as something outside of the realm of empirical physics and only left to theoretical physicists to speculate and compare with moments of the universe after  $T=0$ , when time began — literally came into existence.

One international team of researchers is proposing a different picture of a before of creation, of a time before the Big Bang. Apparently, the singularity of black holes is akin to the Big Bang because the laws of physics appear to break down.

With some complex math and quantum strangeness, the international team of researchers claim the origins of the universe and the center of a black hole can be explained, comprehended, and not seen as a sort of known unknown.

Professor Mir Faizal at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada and the University of British Columbia, Okanagan in British Columbia, Canada explained, “It is known that general relativity predicts that the universe started with a big bang singularity and the laws of physics cannot be meaningfully applied to a singularity.”

Faizal co-authored the paper with Salwa Alsaleh, Lina Alasfar, and Ahmed Farag Ali. Faizal said that the current theories show the singularities, in black holes and at the Big Bang, are built into the interpretations of the math to make the theories. They follow from the math.

However, if they include quantum effects to remove the singularities, then the standard theories based on work by Roger Penrose, Emeritus Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics in the University of Oxford and Emeritus Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, and Stephen Hawking, Director of Research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology within the University of Cambridge, can be modified.

Those changes to remove the singularities imply new models. Those old models without the quantum effects to remove the singularities relied on specific models with problems. One model includes string theory, which, as noted, has its own problems.

Only “very general considerations” rather than a specific model is needed to ‘prove’ the proposal in the paper by Faizal and others. The paper concludes that the centers of black holes do not amount to singularities, but, rather, to empirically testable areas of future research.

“The absence of singularity means the absence of inconsistency in the laws of nature describing our universe, that shows a particular importance in studying black holes and cosmology,” the paper said.

## **Saudi Arabian man renounces Islam, denounces Muhammad, gets death penalty**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**May 1, 2018**

A man renounced Islam and denounced Muhammad. The Saudi man, Ahmad Al-Shamri, as a result got sentenced to death. Al-Shamri posted views about Islam on social media in 2014.

The Saudi authorities became alerted to this activity. Al-Shamri was charged with the crimes of atheism and blasphemy. He was sentenced with the death penalty for the purported crimes.

He was sentenced in February of 2015. He is in his early 20s and is from the eastern Province of Saudi Arabia from the city of Hafar Al-Batin.

Al-Shafri pleaded insanity. That is, he was drunk and high on drugs at the time. This is according to the advisory board member for Human Rights Watch, Hala Dosari.

Dosari said, “His trial focused heavily on Quranic law and little on any mitigating mental illness. As a result, Al-Shamri has been sentenced to death for being an atheist.”

On April 25 2018, the Saudi Supreme Court ruled against Al-Shamri. Saudi Arabia, though known for executions, continues to be on the UN Human Rights Council until 2019. Its term expires at that time.

To leave Islam in Saudi Arabia, it is punishable by death. Adam Coogle, Middle East researcher at Human Rights Watch, explained, “The conservative religious folks have full control of the justice system... Judges come from religious seminaries in Saudi Arabia. They see themselves as preservers of Saudi Arabia’s character as an Islamic state... And they come down hard on people who step out of line.”

# Introducing the Congressional Freethought Caucus

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 1, 2018

Another religious group in the United States House of Representatives advocates for the nonreligious.

Democratic Representatives Jared Huffman (CA), Jamie Raskin (MD), Jerry McNerney (CA), and Dan Kildee (MI) helped form a new caucus.

It is the Congressional Freethought Caucus. The purpose is to help with the advocacy of the interests of the nonreligious.

Many people in the United States do not support religion in government. While others do, the point is to advocate for policies based on reason and science.

One may assume “and not faith and revelation.” A press release talked about a mission of the caucus. It is to “promote public policy based on reason and science, to protect the secular character of our government, and to champion the value of freedom of thought worldwide.”

Good.

The point is an area of agreement for both the nominal, liberal, moderate, and ordinary religious and the nonreligious. The point of secularism. They want to promote secularism.

Still more, they may agree on the need to advocate for science in public policy. It could be “the inspiration” of the public policy if you will.

The bigger goal is to reduce the discrimination against the nonbelieving population in the United States. Those people labelled atheists, agnostics, and humanists.

This caucus, as espoused by itself, can help give voice “for Members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values, and personal religious journeys.”

The Freethought Caucus appears to have an interesting take on the implications of the word religion. The implications of a narrow set of traditional definitions.

This may be increased to the more secular ritualistic lifestyles many American take on board. Religion may decline as a formal structure.

However, the practices morph with the times. Even though, this may not be called religion per se.

Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association, said, “The very existence of this congressional caucus for freethinkers and humanists is a marker of how far the movement for secular and nontheist equality has come.”

Speckhardt continued, “This significant step is also a new beginning for our country as both religious and nonreligious leaders work to better the nation.”

# **Alberta Premier Rachel Notley emphasizes consent in sexual education**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**May 1, 2018**

In efforts throughout Canada to combat sexual misconduct and sexual violence in intimate relations, on campuses, at work, and so on, the country's leaders are working on various methods.

One is consent in sexual education. In the province of Alberta, one emphasized method is consent. Then the various nuances around consent.

Notley said, "We'll be looking at some work at all grade levels. How do we talk about consent as early as kindergarten and moving all the way through to Grade 12? ... We need everybody to learn what consent is and how fundamental it is to relationships between people. They need to learn that at a very young age and be comfortable talking about it."

David Eggen, the education minister in Alberta, explained consent is a part of the ongoing curriculum review. That consent is in some schools and not others.

Eggen notes a consistent approach is necessary. He said, "The safety of our children is paramount. It's very important to have boundaries that students know about, (and) being able to say no."

The earlier education, Eggen states, emphasizes permission and personal space. Notley proclaimed May sexual violence awareness month.

Officials from 10 government ministries and community organizations will work to combat sexual violence. The work will build on previous efforts.

These efforts are spearheaded by Stephanie McLean's Status of Women Ministry. One effort among others will be the work on how the police will respond to sexual assault offences.

Seven grants will be funding organizations addressing sexual violence. New rules will be laid out regarding sexual harassment and assault in the workplace.

Alberta "made legislative changes to allow sexual violence survivors more latitude in filing civil claims and in getting out of leases without penalty."

\$8.1 million (CAD) will go to helping police with more counselling support. This will help courts too.

Rural and Indigenous Alberta residents have long wait lists for supports and counseling. The same may be true for these services rolling out too.

Estimates note sexual assault as the highest under-reported crime in Canada. 1 in 20 victims come forward to report.



# Mandisa Thomas on Black Nonbelievers, Inc.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 2, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** You have extensive experience in hospitality and building the organization Black Nonbelievers, Inc. It is a 501(c)3. So, if you people want to donate or help out in some way, they can bear that in mind.

**That it is a charitable organization. That you would be helping. When it comes to the hospitality industry, there are dos. There are don'ts. What are the dos? What are the don'ts?**

**Mandisa Thomas:** Yes, thank you very much, some of the dos are to try to be welcoming. This has often been a huge ask or a huge question and a huge problem that many other atheist organizations have when it comes to diversity.

How can they attract more women, how they attract more people of color, how they attract more children, it is important to establish some ground rules about to attract and be friendly to others.

It is important not necessarily to simply bombard, especially the new members, with a bunch of questions. One thing I do when I present at events is that I tell organizers and members to engage but also gauge.

Try to be mindful of how you may be coming off to potential new members as well as recurring members, do mind your body language, do just try to ask questions, try not to get too personal with people, set that friendly and welcoming atmosphere, making sure members know what they should and shouldn't do to new people, setting and managing that process is very, very important.

I would say a good thing. One good thing I do is watch people's engagement on a personal level. There are a lot of people who talk about certain issues when they're on a stage or on the online medium.

But when it comes to how they engage people on a personal level or private interaction, it is different. One good rule, I would advise: be punctual, please be on time. Tardiness is something I despise.

I try to make that a general rule: be on time, be consistent as far as your treatment of everyone, don't treat someone who is just new as different from someone of the community. That is the basis of customer service and hospitality.

The person who sweeps the floor should be treated the same as the CEO. That is something that I think that we could learn from in this community.

**Jacobsen:** We have new technologies. That we did not have before for the building of community. So, that can leave a lot more questions about what is appropriate and what is inappropriate in terms of the use of those technologies to advance a movement.

**For instance, you can use a hashtag, but that can be hijacked by people who want to denigrate, harass, and so on, people trying to build that movement. That is one particular example, but there are various ways not necessarily hijacked but misused to undermine a movement.**

**What are some of the things people can be mindful of when they are using these new technologies to build the movements?**

**Thomas:** One thing is to do research such as on an engine and its efficacy as well as being well-informed of the history of said hashtag. Do research on who is using it and why it is being used.

Also, try to gauge, not everything is meant for public consumption. As inclusive as we try to be, it is still important to manage the process as to who we are engaging. If you see someone who is in your group who isn't properly using said medium, you can certainly bring it to their attention or bring it to the attention of the administrator, the leader, or the organizer, we can certainly discuss it.

If it requires removal or dismissing the person who is using it improperly, then it is good to implement that.

**Jacobsen: This interview is completely open. What are some controversial areas of public engagement?**

**Thomas:** In the #MeToo movement, for example, how we are engaging women, how women are engaging the opposite sex in terms of harassment and assault, one good thing or one important aspect is to listen.

If people are telling you that something is making them uncomfortable, you need to listen to them. If someone is telling you that perhaps what you are doing could be different, it is good to take that into perspective and listen to the person or persons.

Evaluate or re-evaluate the norms that have been placed upon us about the roles of men and women as well as the rules of engagement, make sure that you are asking questions, "Is this okay? Is that okay?"

It is important to engage body language as well as what people are saying. I think some people just aren't listening. People are talking to get their point across and not necessarily understanding the other party.

We could get a lot further when people start engaging to work towards a solution and not just to respond and argue. We see a lot of that in the online area. We argue all day long. But then there are certain people who aren't even willing to listen and understand.

**Jacobsen: Right. Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Mandisa.**

**Thomas:** No problem! Thank you.

# Climate change is a necessary discussion

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 3, 2018

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) says, “97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities” ([NASA, 2016b](#)).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report says, “Human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history. Recent climate changes have had widespread impacts on human and natural systems.” ([Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2015](#)).

The British Royal Society says, “Scientists know that recent climate change is largely caused by human activities from an understanding of basic physics, comparing observations with models, and fingerprinting the detailed patterns of climate change caused by different human and natural influences.” ([The Royal Society, 2016b](#)).

And the Government of Canada says, “The science behind man-made climate change is unequivocal. Climate change is a global challenge whose impacts will be felt by all countries, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable. Indeed, impacts are already occurring across the globe. Strong action is required now and Canada intends to be a climate leader.” ([The Government of Canada, 2015b](#)). What do these mean, plainly?

In short, the vast majority of those that spend expertise, money, and time to research the climate affirm that global warming is a reality, and a looming threat to the biosphere ([Upton, 2015](#); [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2015](#)). So that means, in general, if you know what you’re talking about regarding the climate, you understand it’s changing. You know it’s warming globally — not necessarily locally, wherever any particular local is, which would be weather. What does this imply?

Well if it is inevitable and ongoing, then its solution or set of solutions is a necessity, which should be the center of the discussion. Not if, but when, and therefore, how do we work together to prevent and lessen its impacts? There can be legitimate disagreement about the timeline and the severity within a margin of error based on data sets, or meta-analyses, but legitimate conversation starts with an affirmative. So why is it significant?

Because most of the biosphere exists in that “extremely thin sheet of air” ([Hall, 2015](#)) with a thickness of only “60 miles” or ~96.56 kilometers called the atmosphere. It is happening to the minute sheet of the Earth, and in turn affects the biosphere. So small, globally speaking, contributions to the atmosphere can have large impacts throughout the biosphere and climate, as is extrapolated from current and historical data. What is the timeline, and why the urgency?

Because, in general, it will cause numerous changes in decades, not centuries ([Gillis, 2016](#)). That translates into our parents, our own, our (if any) children, and our (if any) current or future grandchildren. In other words, all of us, present and future. What kind of things would, or should, we expect — or even are witnessing?

For starters, we'll experience average increases in global temperatures, impacts to ecosystems and economies, flooding and drought, and affected water sources and forests such as Canada's ([David Suzuki Foundation, 2014b](#); [David Suzuki Foundation, 2014d](#); [David Suzuki Foundation, 2014e](#)).

It affects the health of children and grandchildren, and grandparents, through heat-related deaths, tropical disease increases, and heat-aggravated health problems ([David Suzuki Foundation, 2014c](#)). It is adversely affecting biodiversity ([Harvard University School of Public Health, 2016](#)) and threatening human survival ([Jordan-Stanford, 2015](#)).

Recently it was reported that the Arctic winter sea ice is at a record low ([Weber, 2016](#)). There'll be sea-level rise and superstorms ([Urry, 2016](#)). And it affects all, not just our own, primate species, according to primatologists ([Platt, 2016](#)). So even our closest evolutionary cousins, via proximate ancestry, will be affected too. This is a global crisis. What are major factors?

Population and industrial activity are the big ones. Too many people doing lots of highly pollution-producing stuff. It's greatly connected to the last three centuries' human population explosion and industrialization, which was an increase from about 1 billion to over 7 billion people ([Brooke, 2012](#)). So life on Earth is changing, in part, because of human industrial activity with increasing severity as there are more, and more, human beings on the planet ([Scientific American, 2009](#)). What's being done to prepare for it?

Nations throughout the world are preparing for the relatively predictable general, and severe, impacts of it ([Union of Concern Scientists, n.d.](#)). The international community is aware, and that explains the Paris climate conference (COP21) during late 2015 ([European Commission, 2016](#)), which Prime Minister Trudeau attended for our national representation at this important global meeting ([Fitz-Morris, 2015](#)).

Alberta is making its own preparation too ([Leach, 2015](#)). And, apparently, small municipalities in Canada are not prepared for its impacts ([The Canadian Press, 2015](#); [The University of British Columbia, 2014](#)). But there are those in Alberta such as Power Shift Alberta, hoping to derive solutions to climate change from our youth ([Bourgeois, 2016](#)).

So there's thoughtful consideration, and work, from the international and national to the provincial and territorial, and even municipal levels, for the incoming changing crisis. Whether something can be done about it at one magnitude or another, it is being talked about more with concomitant changes to policy and actions following from them.

All of this preparation, or at least consciousness-raising, is relevant and needing further integration. Climate change will only get more severe unless we do something about it. So, again, that means it's all a question of when, not 'if'.

If we want a long-term, robust solution to assist in the reduction of CO2 emissions, a carbon tax fits the bill for a start. Then there's future energy resources including Hydro, bioenergy, wind, solar, geothermal, and ocean ([Natural Resources Canada, 2016](#)). And the flip side of the coin for an energy source is a place to put that energy via future storage technologies also ([Dodge, 2015](#)).

But there's something needed prior to and alongside all of that, which leads back into the original point. Talk about it. Discussion and conversation is the glue that will bind all of these together. The energy sources and storage-devices of the future, the preparation for the effects of climate change that is happening and will continue to happen, and so on, need chit-chat throughout democratic societies for even more awareness of it.

So let's do something about it, by talking about it more through a national discourse.  
Here and now.

# Lies, damn lies, and dating apps

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 3, 2018

The *Daily Mail* reported on something interesting. Not the fact of people lying to attract mates, that seems inevitable. Human beings lie to date or attract a mate to a date.

Based on reportage of a Stanford University study, they found the most common lies on dating apps. People falsify availability to “deceive potential partners.”

The most common lies were “butler lies.” They are 3/10ths of the lies. With 200 participants and 3,000 messages, the lies centered on relationships rather than starting them.

The situation before some of this research was ambiguous about the types of lying. Now, the vice of lying can be cut into bits via parsing of dating app data.

On the whole, people are honest. 2/3rds of people never lie. 7% were deceptive for sure. The majority of lies were “availability and exaggerating personal interests in an effort to appear more attractive.”

People lie about who they’re with and what they do. Other research has shown men lie about income and height; women lie about age and beauty.

Hancock calls the butler lies the ones that are meant to be polite into to conceal something. That prevents some unwanted social interactions.

30% of lies were white lies.

“One participant messaged, ‘Hey I’m so so sorry, but I don’t think I’m going to be able to make it today. My sister just called and I guess she’s on her way here now. I’d be up for a raincheck if you wanted, though. Sorry again.’”

People tend to be honest, about 66% of the time or 66% of people are, surprisingly, honest and frank in a respectful way. Others not so much, but only to politely avoid some interaction.

The first dating app came from 1995 with Match.com. Single people could give an image and then converse with people. This was purported to help with long-term relationship development.

eHarmony came online around 2000, and 2002 for Ashley Madison for those wanting to cheat on their spouses.

Others include “OKCupid (2004), Plenty of Fish (2006), Grindr (2009) and Happn (2013)” and “Tinder [2012].” Tinder was the first one with a swipe option as the main means for selection of a potential short-term partner — i.e., someone to sleep with.

“After its initial launch it’s usage snowballed and by March 2014 there were one billion matches a day, worldwide,” the *Daily Mail* reported, “In 2014, co-founder of Tinder, Whitney Wolfe Herd launched Bumble, a dating app that empowered women by only allowing females to send the first message.”

# Iowa backs away from reproductive rights (for women)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 4, 2018

An Iowa governor signed some legislation, recently. The legislation bans almost all abortions within the state of Iowa, by implication.

The legislation states that if a heartbeat is detected, then abortion is not allowed by the physician. This is considered one of the most restrictive moves against reproductive rights.

The rights for women to safe and equitable access to abortion gets restricted. This amounts to the most restrictive ban on abortion in the United States of America.

The security at the Iowa Capitol was strengthened around the signing of the bill. Republican Governor Kim Reynolds had several state troopers outside of their office.

Reynolds stated, “I believe that all innocent life is precious and sacred, and as governor, I pledged to do everything in my power to protect it. That is what I am doing today.”

The law will become enacted on July 1, 2018. The Iowa Senate had a vote that was more or less split, but the bill was approved for the ban of most abortions in the state of Iowa.

The ban requires women to undergo abdominal ultrasounds with physicians for a test of a fetal heartbeat if a woman wants to seek an abortion.

With a detectable heartbeat, the physician can decline the performance of an abortion. Fetal heartbeats can be detected as early as 6 weeks into a pregnancy, according to experts.

Planned Parenthood for the Heartland (PPH) declared they would sue Iowa. The PPH executive officer, Suzanna de Baca, said:

*It's shameful that when Planned Parenthood heard lawmakers were introducing legislation to ban abortion, we were outraged — but we weren't surprised... But I think many of us still never expected that Governor Reynolds would so swiftly jump to sign a bill that is so clearly unconstitutional.*

An Iowa law banned most abortions after 20 weeks last year. Republican Iowa lawmakers are looking to advance legislation to challenge *Roe v. Wade*.

*Roe v. Wade*, from 1973, set the early stage for the advancement of women's rights constitutional protection for the right to an abortion.

# **Muslim celebrity doctor to be appointed by former television personality American president**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**May 4, 2018**

President Donald Trump intends to appoint Dr. Oz. Oz is famous for false cures and fad diets. All questionable in efficacy.

Both men are TV personalities in history and at present. Both will wield much power. Both, in their records (rather than looking into their eyes to see their “soul”), abused power and influence in the past.

They seem to care more about image, self-aggrandizement, and enrichment to themselves and their small cadre of wealth constituents.

The questions then emerge about means by which these individuals will abuse the power of the US Administration to enrich themselves.

Oz will join the President’s Council on Sport, Fitness, and Nutrition. Bill Belichick, of the New England Patriots, will join Oz on this council. Does life imitate comedy or comedy imitate life?



# KPIRG-KPU-Hossein controversy continues

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 5, 2018

*The Runner* reported on one of the many ongoing scandals at KPU (Kwantlen Polytechnic University).

This time with the Kwantlen Public Research Group (KPIRG). The Kwantlen Student Association (KSA) Council meeting, on April 6 2018, elected a new president, Caitlin McCutchen.

McCutchen stated, that the KSA is unable to confirm plans of defunding KPIRG or not based on the alleged fraud of Richard Hossein.

Hossein is a former staff member and the founder of the organization who may have absconded with over CAD100,000.

“We have the autonomy agreement, and this mismanagement of funds, essentially, is in breach of a few different parts of this autonomy agreement,” says McCutchen. “If there are breaches or violations, we have the option to stop remitting funds to them, which would not mean that we’re shutting down KPIRG. It would just mean we’re not giving them the funding.”

The current student senate representative and a former KPIRG board member, Kim McMartin, worked with Hossein. She “voluntarily excluded herself from an in-camera discussion that took place during the meeting. This was due to a conflict of interest, and she declined to give any other comment on the record,” according to *The Runner*.

The former KSA president, Tanvir Singh, attended as a student who was concerned about the situation.

Singh explained, “Through all of my roles, I’ve never had a good relationship with KPIRG.. I’ve talked to multiple students and most people don’t know what they do. I think that this situation [with the Hossein lawsuit] in and of itself is the nail in the coffin. I think it’s time for students at KPU to seriously consider defunding KPIRG.”

Of the original signatories for the autonomy agreement, Hossein was one of the three people to do so, this autonomy agreement included the “provisions that allow the KSA to terminate it for breach of contract or by referendum.”

Article 7 may have been breached of the autonomy agreement. Because the KPIRG KSA funding must be utilized “exclusively towards accomplishing those purposes set out under the KPIRG constitution and for no other purpose.”

Same with Article 8: “all transactions that KPIRG enters into with third parties must be commercially reasonable and comply with KPIRG’s constitution, bylaws, and the *Society Act* or any successor Act.”

Article 33 firmly states that the event of a termination of the autonomy agreement would result in “any funds or property in possession of the KSA, at the time of the termination of this Agreement, shall remain in the possession of the KSA, and deemed to be the lawful property of the KSA. All unremitted fees shall be transferred into bursaries for KPU Students with criteria relating to social and environmental justice oriented individuals in financial need.”

## Kentucky (and Mississippi) pass bills to restrict women's reproductive rights

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 5, 2018

CNN reported on the signing into law of a bill prohibiting women in Mississippi from having abortions after 15 weeks.

These abortions are restrictive. Kentucky's own governor, after the Mississippi governor's example, did similar. Governor Matt Bevin signed House Bill 454 to ban a procedure.

A common abortion procedure called dilation and evacuation starting earlier. That is 11 week after fertilization or into the pregnancy.

The only permitted exception is medical emergencies (ed. I do not know if this includes cases of rape). Bevin, according to the reportage, has been a longstanding anti-abortion activist.

He banned abortions after 20 weeks while in governance of Kentucky. There was another attempted, but failed, bill to make women look at unborn fetuses and listen to heartbeats prior to an abortion. The decision, even with being overturned, is begin appealed.

The entire state of Kentucky is now down to one abortion clinic. A federal judge has the fate of that sole clinic in their hands now.

CNN affiliated, WDRB, in Louisville (Kentucky) stated that the governor opined:

*HB 454 signifies Kentucky's unwavering commitment to protecting the rights of unborn children. In a society that increasingly devalues human life, we must continue to unapologetically advance laws that will protect those who cannot protect themselves. With every pro-life bill that becomes law, we send the same message: Kentucky stands for life.*

## **RU-486 sold over 4,000 times in Canada in 2017**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**May 5, 2018**

*CBC News* reported on the number of abortion pills prescribed by doctors in Canada.

The number was about 4,000 for Mifegymiso. This is the first year that the drug was available in Canada. Health Canada stated that the 4,253 new prescriptions — estimated number — were dispensed by Canadian retail pharmacies.

Mifegymiso or RU-486 is an admixture of two drugs. These, together or alone, terminate early pregnancies. It was approved for Canadian use in 2015.

Health Canada placed restrictions on the use of the drug with particular requirements. Restrictions on pregnancies less than seven weeks. Doctors who prescribe must have a training course.

The restrictions were lifted in November 2017. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, the Canadian Federal Health Minister, sought to ease restrictions. Because the demand was higher.

Taylor explained, “Our government has been very clear when it comes to reproductive health rights for women. We want to make sure all options are available for women. We can see that there’s certainly a need when we look at the numbers.”

Many groups that argue for the increased access of RU-486 approve of the ease on the restrictions.

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights Director of Health Promotion Frederique Chabot said, “When I think of women, for example, in Nunavik in Quebec who have to travel to Montreal to seek care — that’s a plane ride and days away from your family, days away from your community and work. So we have a chance now to address some access issues.”

Chabot noted the problem with the expenses. It can be between CAD400 and CAD450 per dose. British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia have some healthcare coverage.

Women in other areas need private drug plans or need to pay from their own pockets. It is an expensive abortifacient. If a woman has access, then she can afford it; if she can’t afford it, then she doesn’t have financial access.

Chabot stated, “Our government has been clear about that and that’s why we’ve moved forward in making sure this medication is available to women.”

Viersen did not respond to requests for an interview about Health Canada’s response to his question.

## Second round for humanism course, free and online

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 5, 2018

Round two is beginning for the popular online and free (!) course on humanism. It is entitled 'Introducing humanism: non-religious approaches to life.'

If you are a humanist, or a non-religious person with an interest in humanist ethics grounded in science and naturalism, or are a curious religious person with an intrigue in other points of view, this is a course for you.

Sandi Toksvig will teach with a step-by-step process the facets of the humanist worldview. The commitment need only be an hour or so per week to survey the material.

It amounts to a university-level course on humanist, but 'lite' like a 'lite beer' brew. The purpose is to be fun and informative with various content, videos, text material, and so on.

You can take part.

# Professor Al-Khalili on science communication and science

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 5, 2018

**Professor Jameel Sadik “Jim” Al-Khalili OBE** is a British theoretical physicist, author and broadcaster. He is currently Professor of Theoretical Physics and Chair in the Public Engagement in Science at the University of Surrey. In this interview, he speaks with Scott Jacobsen about what has driven him to pursue this career, his socially progressive outlook, his association with the British Humanist Association and the congruences between science and humanism.

The interview has been edited for clarity and readability.

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** How did you become an activist and a scientist, and science communicator?

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** I think it’s fair to say that my career evolved gradually. When I began my academic life it very much followed the traditional route of PhD, postdoctoral research, at University College London then Surrey, then I secured a five-year research fellowship after which I became a full time (tenured) academic lecturer and moved up the academic ranks to professor by teaching and conducting research in my field of theoretical physics. I did all the usual stuff of publishing my research, attending conferences and applying for grants.

But around the mid-90s I also became active in outreach activities and communicating science more widely to the public. I found I enjoyed this as much as I did my other academic activities. I began to get involved as a contributor to radio and TV programmes and wrote my first popular science book, on black holes, in 1999. From then on, one thing led to another. Over the past decade I have been more involved in public life, but always speaking as a representative of the scientific world.

**Jacobsen:** Were parents or siblings an influence on this for you?

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** Not particularly. They were encouraging and supportive. But it was my wife who really enabled me to do what I do now.

**Jacobsen:** Did you have early partnerships in these activist and scientific pursuits? If so, whom?

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** Science is a collaborative endeavour, so over the years I have built up a wide range of colleagues and collaborators, whether in my research fields or in the public arena. The academics in the nuclear physics group at Surrey are scientists I have worked with over the years and published many research papers with. Several senior colleagues were also valuable mentors for me, supporting my development in my early career.

**Jacobsen:** How did you come to adopt a socially progressive worldview?

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** I don’t feel my worldview is particularly different from the vast majority of people I interact with on a daily basis. First and foremost, I am a scientist and so I try to see the world objectively and demand evidence for views, policies and beliefs. I am also liberal and

secular in my politics. I served for three years as president of the British Humanist Association and I feel that my humanist values do indeed shape my worldview to a large extent. Last but not least, I come from a mixed culture and heritage background: born in Iraq to a Muslim Arab father and Christian English mother, I feel I can have a broader perspective on the world that is not shaped by just one ideology.

**Jacobsen: Why do you think that adopting a social progressive outlook is important?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** It depends on how one defines ‘socially progressive’, since I suspect that people from a wide cross-section of the political and social spectrum might regard themselves as forward-thinking and progressive. I also feel it is important to stress that being socially progressive is meaningless if we do not learn the lessons from the past. We cannot wipe slates clean and move forward without understanding where we have come from.

**Jacobsen: Do you consider yourself a progressive?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** I hope so. I can say that I am an optimist about the future, despite the many challenges that face the world today.

**Jacobsen: Does progressivism logically imply other beliefs, or tend to or even not at all?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** I think it is one of those terms that can easily be adopted by many ideologies. Maybe it is quite a clearly defined ideology or worldview in its own right. If so, then I need to learn more about what it implies.

**Jacobsen: What are your religious/irreligious beliefs?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** I am not religious. I guess I am defined as an atheist, which is a strange term since it implies there has to be a supernatural being, a god, in the first place for me not to believe in! Essentially ‘atheism’ is for me no more a belief system in itself than not collecting stamps is a hobby.

**Jacobsen: As a progressive, what do you think is the best socio-political position to adopt in the United Kingdom?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** Ideologically, I align myself with the liberal left and the social welfare stance of the traditional Labour movement.

**Jacobsen: What big obstacles (if at all) do you see social-progressive movements facing at the moment?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** In the UK, I think the biggest challenge is the disillusionment of many in society, such as those who voted Brexit, which manifests itself in a craving for elements of the past: a return to some perceived utopia when ‘things were better’. For me this is the opposite of a social-progressive movement.

**Jacobsen: How important do you think social movements are?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** I find this quite difficult to answer because today social movements can grow so quickly that there is often not enough time to consider carefully what they actually stand for. We live in an age of post-truth politics, disillusionment with establishment, vast inequalities in society, and social media that can pick up a meme and spread it faster than a virus. In this environment, social movements can thrive. But that does not necessarily mean that all social movements are for the good.

**Jacobsen: What does your current work focus on?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** I am doing many things. My academic career continues, as does my broadcasting, and I am excited about new developments in scientific research. In recent months I have stepped back from a lot of my public work to focus on writing, not least of which is my first novel, which I hope will come out next year.

**Jacobsen: Where do you hope your professional work will go into the future?**

**Prof. Al-Khalili:** Well, I hope to continue as it is today. I am very happy doing what I do.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, Professor Al-Khalili.**

Keep up-to-date with Professor Al-Khalili's work by following his Twitter account: [@jimalkhalili](https://twitter.com/jimalkhalili)

# **World Humanist Day Supporter Pack and Crowdfunding**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**May 5, 2018**

The International Humanist and Ethical Union is counting down World Humanist Day.

It is on June 21. IHEYO is counting down with them. This year, IHEU launched Humanists At Risk as a crowdfunding campaign. this will help raise awareness and support for humanist concerns.

They helped raised, in a similar campaign before, about £10,000.00 “to help defend, protect and support humanists at risk around the world,” as noted in an email.

This is currently an annual crowdfunding campaign to ask for financial support. This financial support will go to helping raise awareness and to hopefully, eventually, support humanists who are at risk.

You can download the supporter pack here:

“We’re in!” — Download the supporter pack

IHEU continues to be a beacon, and umbrella, for humanist activities. The goal is to advocate for human rights, help at-risk humanists. Also, to help document discrimination, this can help catalogue the issues for humanists around the world.

World Humanist Day, in this view, becomes a great means and mechanism to support humanism and humanists around the world.

That’s why World Humanist Day is the perfect moment to harness solidarity within the global humanist community and get behind the vital work of the IHEU.

This supporter pack “includes graphics, a poster for events, news story copy for your website or press release, and template messages for social media.”



# On Intergenerational Communication With Mr. Melvin Lars

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 5, 2018

*Mr. Melvin Lars is a native of Bossier City/Shreveport, Louisiana; he received several undergraduate and graduate academic degrees from various universities; La. Tech. (BS) Univ. & Centenary (Admin. Cert.) College) in Louisiana, Texas (Tx. Southern (MA) Univ), Michigan (Eastern, Mi Univ, & Saginaw Valley St. Univ.) and has done extensive educational studies in Ohio (Youngstown (Supt., cert.) St Univ) and California (Los Angeles, (CA. cert) City College).*

*Lars is a certified Violence Prevention/Intervention Specialist, receiving his certification and training through the prestigious Harvard University, with Dr. Renee Prothro-Stith.*

*He is a licensed/ordained Elder/Minister in both the C.O.G.I.C. & C.M.E. Churches. He is the CEO/founder of Brighter Futures Inc; a Family Wellness, Violence Prevention/Intervention and Academic Enhancement and entertainment Company; an affiliate representative for the NFL ALLPRODADS Initiative. Former interim; Executive Director of Urban League of Greater Muskegon, Former NAACP President of Muskegon County; 2007–2012, employed as a consultant to the Michigan Department of Education as a Compliance Monitor for the (NCLB Highly Qualified) initiative for Highly Qualified Teachers and works collaboratively with Hall of Famer Jim Brown and his Amer-I-Can Program and is a ten-time published author of various books, and self-help and academic articles. He is married to Ann Lars and is the father of one adult son, Ernest. Here we talk about intergenerational communication in an uncensored and educational series.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to the conversations around intergenerational bonding, communication, and the facilitation of those bonds and communication, we had a discussion on the platform The Good Men Project.

**With respect to building intergenerational bonds and communication, what seem like some of the more important aspects of that to you?**

**Melvin Lars:** The first aspect would be for both parties to listen. I think, and I feel very strongly, that the older generation needs to listen more. Unfortunately, older people have a propensity not to listen to the younger people. Older generations want to “share our wisdom” and then for the wisdom to be absorbed.

Next part, which is important, we should listen with purpose. Am I listening to hear what the young person is sharing? Or am I listening to then respond and placate the young person?

We have to be willing to accept and to hear what is being expressed in order to bridge this communication gap. Because one should be clear, I may have felt strongly about something at age 20. Now, let’s say, I am 65-years-old.

Since I have the same feeling at 65 as I did at 20, it does not mean that I am right. I should listen with a purpose.

**Jacobsen:** Would this amount to listening to learn rather than listening to respond to the young person?

**Lars:** Absolutely, the human race is notorious for listening to respond to the person rather than listening to learn from the person. We do not listen to people. We are thinking about our responses while another person is thinking. So yes, it is critical and crucial.

**Jacobsen: What do you notice as some stronger points of communication or even wisdom coming from the younger generation to the older generation, and vice versa?**

**Lars:** First, older guys tend to be appeasing. When we — us older guys — sit down to have a conversation, the point is to delete preconceived notions of the outcome of the conversation or the dialogue. The point is to delete the idea, “This young person has nothing to offer me.”

We need to delete the idea of placation of the young person. We need to “allow” the young person to share with us. Then we venture into telling the young person what we think and what we know, and what has been proven over the years to us — the older person.

It is important to note. Everyone understands when he or she is being placated. We may not respond angrily. We may use a modicum of respect and decorum. However, in my experience, most people shut down if being placated. They do not like it.

They may not leave. They may not move, but they have, basically, shut down. The conversation becomes the famous “Charlie Brown” teacher talking when Charlie Brown tunes the teacher out, “Wa-wa-wa-wa.” The conversation becomes a “wa-wa-wa-wa” because as an older person I have already disrespected you.

As a younger person, you relish the fact that I am older. You allow me to do it. We should not be allowed to do it, honestly. Old people should not be allowed to be disrespectful.

Although, it may not be yelling. It may not be screaming. But when we you condescend to people, to me, that is *ultimate disrespect*. The voice does not have to be raised any decibel. Profanity does not have to be used. But when individuals start to placate you or something indicates placation, this is ultimate disrespect.

We should not allow that to be a part of a conversation when we’re talking about growth and communication between generations.

**Jacobsen: For adolescent men, young men, middle-aged men, and elderly men, what seem like the barriers for that communication?**

**Lars:** I laugh. Because older men would like you to think that we have it all together. We would like you to think that we are flawless. We would you like to think that we have made no mistakes in our lives. We would like you to think that the skeletons in our closet are there, *accidentally*.

We would not like you to think that we were not prepared for certain situations and consequences, but those skeletons are there. I want to speak from an old man’s perspective. We have to be very careful because you can send the wrong message to younger generations.

We can have three generations here. An old man like myself, a young man like Scott, and a younger man Scott would be addressing; we have to allow room for people to grow. We have to allow room for people to say, “I experienced. I can read. I can infer. I have knowledge to understand when I read something, when I see something. I have the ability to discern.”

Although, there may be very, very strong areas. That we may need to cover in conversation. It is ensuring the atmosphere is such that individuals are allowed to discern. That they are allowed to infer.

Because if we do not do that, then it is wasted air.

**Jacobsen: How can the media and the larger culture facilitate this communication?**

**Lars:** [Laughing] Oh wow! That question, for me, is a loaded one. So, I have to be careful. Everything with the media is pre-packaged. The only questions they are going to ask will elicit the response that they want from the person.

Real opinions do not appear. Let me put it this way, they do not appear interested in what an individual truly thinks about particular topics or events. They seem interested in eliciting the certain preferable responses. The media is, in and of itself, a very critical piece of the process.

However, in my opinion that, there needs to be some structure. There should be questions prepared beforehand. However, individuals should be allowed to segue. Not be allowed to go on and on and on, but at least be able to give more “insight,” if I can use that word, into what is being discussed rather than being steered into a direction that an individual wants the conversation to go.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Mr. Lars.**

# The Urgent Case of Noura Hussein Hammad

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 10, 2018

*Sodfa Daaji is the Chairwoman of the Gender Equality Committee and the North Africa Coordinator for the Afrika Youth Movement. Here we talk about Noura Hussein Hammad's urgent case. The hashtag: #JusticeForNoura. Daaji's email if you would like to sign: daajisodfa.pr@gmail.com.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Hammad is a young woman. We are young humanists. What are some things we can learn from this current urgent, crisis of Hammad?

**Sodfa Daaji:** I think that there are mainly two things that we can learn from Noura's case. The first one is that injustice is prevalent, exists, and we can find cases of injustice even around the corner. We do not have to go on the other side of the world, and we must pay more attention about what happens every day. The second lesson, the most powerful to me, is the power of people. On the last hours we are mobilizing from different countries, and everyone is trying to give its own contribution. If we gather together, we can do remarkable things, and the power of solidarity will give for sure impressive results.

**Jacobsen:** Is this common for young women in many countries around the world?

**Daaji:** Unfortunately, yes. UN is advocating with organizations, activists, and governments to achieve the SDGs on 2030, but the truth is that in some countries forced marriage, marital rape, gender-based violence are something normal, and all these forms of violence are justified with tradition, culture, and religion.

Today Noura has been condemned to death, but two days ago a woman has been killed in Sudan by al-Shabab fighters. According to the journalists, the fighters are applying a strict interpretation of Sharia, but my question is: why those kinds of interpretations are always affecting just women?

It is time for us, academics, advocates, organizations, member of civil society to have a clear distinction between religion, culture, tradition and how they are used — especially by men — to dominate women and to have power on their bodies.

**Jacobsen:** How do the government and religion restrict the movement, equality, and consent of women in various aspects of their such as marriage, sex, children, and the legality around those same issues?

**Daaji:** Sudan has a bad record of accomplishment on human rights and having Sharia Law does not help when it comes to freedom. Death penalty is applied also to atheists, apostasy, or for changing religion and belief.

The fact that we have heard lately about Noura's case show how Sudan is restricting freedom of speech and religion. Nahid, the woman who is following Noura personally, director of SEEMA, has been jailed multiple times, and one of Afrika youth movement's volunteers.

To overcome this, youth need to change the narrative and reverse what is perceived as traditional and normal. Luckily Sudanese youth are aware and have a deep knowledge about their rights, and they are not afraid to fight to get and build a better future.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Sadfa.

# Call to Action on Noura Hussein Hammad from Sodfa Daaji

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 10, 2018

*Sodfa Daaji is the Chairwoman of the Gender Equality Committee and the North Africa Coordinator for the Afrika Youth Movement. Here we talk about Noura Hussein Hammad's urgent case. The hashtag: #JusticeForNoura. Daaji's email if you would like to sign: daajisodfa.pr@gmail.com.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Noura Hussein Hammad is a Sudanese woman up for the death penalty at only 19-years-old. Why?**

**Sodfa Daaji:** Ms. Noura on May 10th, 2018 has been condemned to death penalty, under the article 130, for intentional homicide. Of course, we are against the decision of the court, and against the application of Sharia Law. Noura has not committed a homicide but she has defended herself from a violent husband, who has raped her without any pity. How can we, on 2018, hear about a woman condemned to death for self defence?

We are urging the Sudanese authorities to take in consideration Noura's story, who is now psychologically damaged. Noura has been forced to get married to a relative, then she has faced a rape, physical violence, and gender-based violence.

**Jacobsen: What role do religion and some men's belief of their ownership of women play into this?**

**Daaji:** It is not up religion, but it is up the way religion is interpreted and used by men to justify their violence and domination on women. Religion have always discriminated women, as those who need men's protection and education.

And with the years we are assisting on a deterioration of the interpretations when it comes to religion. On Sudan is applied Sharia Law, and the culture is confirming the way men perceive and treat women.

Of course, on Noura's case religion and some men's belief has played a key role: Some people have said that her husband had the right to rape her since she was her wife. This sentence resume perfectly the cultural conflict present in Sudan, between people who are aware about what is violence, and those who validate violence.

**Jacobsen: What has been the outcry from the general public over this?**

**Daaji:** Luckily Noura's case spread around and we are assisting to actions and mobilisation in support. A note goes to Sudanese youth, who are fighting without any fear, and today went in front of the court to give support to Noura.

Their voice is putting in a corner those who are validating the violence that Noura has received, thinking that her husband and her family had all the rights to ruin her childhood and life.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Sodfa.**

# In Conversation with Marieme Helie Lucas on Noura Hammad's Death Penalty

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 11, 2018

*Marieme Helie Lucas is an Algerian sociologist, activist, founder of 'Secularism is a Women's Issue,' and founder and former International Coordinator of 'Women Living Under Muslim Laws.'*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Noura Hussein Hammad is a Sudanese woman up for the death penalty at only 19-years-old. Why?

**Marieme Helie Lucas:** She was given in marriage at age 15 by her *wali* (matrimonial tutor, as law permits in Sudan) against her expressed will, steadily reiterated during four years.

When she was finally taken to his house for the consummation of the marriage at age 19, she refused to have sex with him; on the 5th day, he called upon his male relatives to hold her down and raped her in their presence; the day after when he attempted to rape her again, she stabbed him in self defense.

She willingly went to the police station with her father to explain the circumstances. She is a victim of child marriage, forced marriage, rape and any other violations of her fundamental human rights.

However, yesterday, she has been sentenced to death by hanging and her lawyers have 15 days to appeal of the judgment. It is a very short time to try and save the life of this courageous young victim who never failed in her determination to be respected as a human being and to defend her dignity.

Women's rights and human rights defenders who are fighting on Noura's behalf in Sudan believe the case needs to be supported from outside. The Constitution of Sudan, the Human rights treaties Sudan signed should help protect her; but we need to coalesce protests from within and from outside the country.

Appeals have been sent to the President of Sudan. I encourage everyone to sign on the online petitions that are now widely circulated of Aawaz and on Change; to lobby their nearest human rights organizations; to call upon media to provide an accurate picture of the situation and not a biased or racist or ethnocentric one.

**Jacobsen:** What role do religion and some men's perception of their ownership of women play into this?

**Helie Lucas:** Marriage laws in Sudan are based on religious interpretations of Islam. This is the case in many but not all so-called Muslim countries.

Even within the countries which expressly claim their choice of applying religious laws, those vary greatly from one country to another, in some cases granting no rights at all to women within marriage, in other cases granting equal rights and responsibilities to both spouses, with all the shades in between.

Various factors can explain these differences that include different interpretations of religion, of course, but also the incorporation of traditional practices into what is being propagated as religion itself (such as female genital mutilation), or simply the stage of democratic and progressive forces in a specific country.

To give you a graphic example, two neighboring countries such as Algeria and Tunisia, both culturally homogeneous as located in North Africa, and religiously homogeneous as both are following Maliki ritual, had opposite laws regarding *polygyny*: in Algeria it was legal as per the first part of the verse of the Koran which allows each man four wives and as many concubines he can support; in Tunisia it was banned as per the second part of the same verse ‘provided he can treat them perfectly equally’ — the Tunisian legislators, as early as 1956, immediately after independence, ruled that no human being can possibly treat his wives perfectly equally — he can give them same money, same dress, same jewelry but not same love, hence they concluded this was a deterrent regarding polygamy.

This debate about ‘true’ interpretation of religion is not specific to Islam: you can see something very similar in predominantly Christian countries whose laws, for instance on reproductive rights, vary greatly from one to the other. Similarly, even among Catholics views are different on contraception, whether one listens to the Vatican, to the Opus Dei or to liberation theologians in Latin America.

The fact is that patriarchy always made alliances with the most regressive forces within religions — we see that with Hinduism and even Buddhism which enjoys such a good reputation among westerners these days -, and that women’s human rights are greatly affected in the process.

For the past few decades, the most conservative trends have been steadily growing within Islam; this entails, among other things, a tightening on democratic and progressive forces, on women’s and human rights organizations, changes in laws that are reformulated in order to fit new regressive interpretations of religion, etc...

### **Jacobsen: What has been the outcry from the general public over this?**

**Helie Lucas:** There is an outcry in Sudan itself, with human rights and women’s rights organizations at the forefront. There is a very courageous website in defense of Noura, run by Sudanese from within Sudan. There are two online petitions on Aawaz and on Change being circulated. They are massively signed.

Opposition to the judgment grows also from within predominantly Muslim countries in Africa, in South Asia, in South East Asia. Now Europe and North America have joined in the worldwide protest. It is very important that efforts be made in support to one another. For this reason, it cannot be based on superiority and accusation of barbarity whether against Africans or against Muslims as such.

Our success in promoting a respectful coverage of the situation — with due credit to the courageous Sudanese fighting for rights from within -, the fact that Sudan’s Constitution should allow for the protection of Noura’s human rights, the fact that Sudan is a signatory to several human rights conventions and treaties, may be crucial in preventing a defensive reaction from the Sudanese authorities, and could greatly affect Noura’s fate.

This judgment is a blatant denial of fundamental human rights, it was a matter of self-defense in a case of marital rape; it should remain a human rights, women’s rights and child rights issue and not be turned into a religious issue.

# Bwambale Robert Musubaho on the humanist movement and humanist education in Uganda

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 12, 2018

*Robert Bwambale is the founder of the Kasese United Humanist Association (KUHA) with “the goal of promoting Freethought in Uganda.” The association is affiliated with the extremely active Uganda Humanist Association (UHA). In March, the UHA held a conference in Kampala whose theme was Humanism For a Free and Prosperous Africa. The Kasese United Humanist Association is a member organization in the IHEYO Africa Working Group, and has participated in humanist conferences. He is also the director of a few primary schools set up to encourage a humanistic method of learning.*

**Jacobsen:** Who are some inspirational people in the humanist movement for you?

**Robert Bwambale:** Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Carl Sagan, Late Josh Kutchinsky, Robert Ingersol, Bertrand Russell, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, Paul Kurtz, Leo Igwe. Ricky Gervais.

**Jacobsen:** How does a humanist education provide the basis for being a functional citizen in a society?

**Bwambale:**

- Humanist education empowers citizens to think for themselves and devise ways how they can better their lives.
- Humanist education encourages citizens to get united irrespective of what believe in.
- Humanist education encourages respect for human right freedoms
- Humanist education enlightens the locals about the dangers of belief in magic and superstitions which is deep ridden in ou communities. It dispels performing of rituals and believing in fairies.
- Humanist education encourages citizens to get involved in managing their own affairs, better governance, conflict resolutions and emphasizes peace.
- Humanist education promotes tolerance among people with mixed difference in thinking, beliefs, race etc to come together and work for the common good of humanity.
- Humanist education exposes people to critical thinking which is a guiding principle that boosts the intellect of the human mind.

**Jacobsen:** What differentiates a humanist education from a religious education?

**Bwambale:** Humanist education empowers power to question everything while religious education doesnt.

Humanist education encourages people to think for themselves while religious education gives authority and respect to the gods or god to think, guide or plan for us.



Humanist education encourages appreciation of science and deals with facts, experimentation, analysis, research and deductions while religious education emphasizes people to have faith, believe in what they cannot see, miracles, etc.

Humanist education emphasizes that we are part and parcel of nature and that we are products of nature while religious education stipulates that we were created by a god and that a woman was created from a man's rib.

Humanist education encourages things which are practical in nature, that can be seen while religious education encourages belief in a divine thing, unseen, revelations, or dreams of some sort.

Humanist education is against homophobia while religious education promotes homophobia.

Humanist education cherishes evolutionary science while religious education cherishes creation science, intelligent design, and pseudoscience.

Humanist education encourages learners to read a variety of books or any book that they come across while religious education encourages people to read a specific book attached to their belief or religion.

Humanist education has no room for rituals, fairies, spirits, fables, sacrifices while religious education is well empowered with all these aforementioned stuff.

**Jacobsen: What are the textbooks used in humanist curricula? How do the humanist principles build into this education?**

**Bwambale:** There is no pre-set text books in the humanist curriculum. Most of the things we teach are gathered from several sources both in some free thought books by different personalities and of recent the Humanism for schools website has been a great resource.

Below are some of the valuable books that have been helpful: Humanism for children by Nada Topic peratovic, center for civil courage, *Humanism* by Barbara smoker, Critical thinking document by Leo Igwe. *Humanism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld) by Peter Cave, *Atheist Universe* by David Mills.

This website by the British Humanist association has been helpful <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/>

The humanist principles gives an array about what being a humanist entails and these acts as start ups that orientates any person who could want to know about what humanism or being a humanist requires.

**Jacobsen: How do the religious authorities react to the humanist and non-religious educational institutions? Do they attempt to shut them down?**

**Bwambale:** Oh yes, they seem to be against them since they think allowing people to reason, ask questions, and boosting people's exposure to the internet would enlighten them and threaten their congregations to go low.

Many attempts or misconceptions have been put on my initiatives propelled by religious zealots in an attempt to tarnish my projects but since what i do is always in plain color, many have realized that am innocent, smart and not harmful to the society whatsoever since I am an agitator for peace, knowledge, and a better informed Uganda.

**Jacobsen: What is the better way to donate to the organization?**

**Bwambale:** Donations to my initiatives can be relayed through:

Atheist Alliance international

<https://www.atheistalliance.org/campaigns/kasese-humanist-school/>

Brighter Brains Institute

<https://www.brighterbrains.biz/schools/>

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Robert.**

## **Interview with Giltimi/Morris Amos of the C'imotza Beaver Clan on Fear and Love, and the Future**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**May 16, 2018**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** We first met in a closed-door minor political party meeting. You came with two others. More or less, you came down from Kitimat and disseminate knowledge.

Now, I did not know a lot before. I know some more now, but know the more I know the less I know in the scope of what I realize I do not know.

I know young people, such as myself, take on particular views. One is not knowing much about the history of the country and the various peoples and faiths within it. Another is aggressive activism that makes other peoples “the other.”

I mean this in the full context of othering people from all sides. When I brought this perspective to yourself, and Haimus Wakas as well, Haimus educated me.

Same with you. You both, in essence, described a view of the current state of affairs for the current generation and the next generations.

One beyond dualities, e.g. us and them, and of real forgiveness. That, in your ‘heart of hearts,’ you have moved forward from the past, but want younger people to think beyond dualities. That provides the context.

**More the points, what do you mean by moving beyond dualities?**

**Giltimi (Morris Amos):** I am Giltimi of the C'imotza Beaver Clan. I am advisor to Haimus Wakas, the Hereditary Chief of the C'imotza Raven Clan.

Moving beyond dualities — I am aware of what constitutes history, History, as we have known it, is largely written by the victors in war. What this tells me is history is a tool for the victors to continue control and manipulation over those conquered.

This world view is mine, as a member of an oppressed race of people's. The victors in the oppression of my people's have written history of white contact with my people from an entirely ethnocentric point of view, thereby writing the Indian out of history books.

This is changing now as people are elevating their consciousness, which is another topic. I am now satisfied, from my research, that the perpetrators of violence against my people have done so with a plan to eventually dominate the entire earth.

Some call this plan the New World Order. I am now satisfied that white people are victimized by this plan just like the Indian. We are all oppressed by this plan. I am not opposed to world order but I oppose the New World Order as planned due to the nature of the control and manipulation mechanisms as proposed and also to the reasons for desire of control which is simply to be in control for self effacing purposes, not for the good interests of humanity.

Therefore, as advisor to Haimus Wakas, I have made it my business to study those that would control and enslave humanity by various means, such as banking, law, food production, big

pharma, oil and gas, etc. I have found that they have a predictable modus operandi not the least of which is the now quaint method of divide and conquer.

This method currently is used extensively to separate us into various camps, making it easier for the perpetrators to create problems for us and to self aggrandize their agenda by promulgating solutions. An enlightened mind will see the nature of the method is based on fear in all its derivatives, which in resource terms equates to what I call the consciousness of lack.

This form of thought is used to conflict people and is fueled by banking cartels who use ancient techniques to create poverty while forcing people to compete for limited amounts of jobs. A fear based pursuit of economic security becomes an obsession for peoples who succumb in a manner that makes them fodder for the modus operandi of divide and conquer.

We have been engulfed by duality and polarity. Duality of opposites such as up and down, in and out, black and white. This translates into what I call the dance of light and dark. The dark has held sway over humanity for millenniums of time, with the rise in consciousness, the light is now on the rise. The light equates with love, the polar opposite of fear.

It is clear to me that remnants of fear still exists which requires more effort to replace it with love, the highest energy of Great Spirit. Such is the nature of my efforts to bring to light the requirement of unity. Unity based on the existence of love will be the basis of a world order, not the current attempts to create a new world order based on fear.

We cannot make love, it exists, therefore we have to relearn how to allow love. Love is not exclusionary. I now use this forum to call an end to the denial of my people, the genocide of my people, we must be included in the move toward love.

The continued denial of my people is an obstacle to our spiritual evolution. The denial of my people has created a resentment of settlers which can only be remediated by an end to denial based on divisiveness.

New World Order creation of divisiveness in a manner that succeeded in demonizing my people in a way that caused the settlers to support the devious plan caused resentment.

When we see a real truth movement to out the NWO and end this denial then I submit that the resentment will leave and indigenous will forgive and welcome a new real partnership with our visitors who never left. There is a requirement to make a clear distinction between white people and the NWO.

When made clear it becomes apparent that indigenous resentment toward settlers is just as misguided as settler fear based resentment towards my people. To get past this is to disempower the NWO and put us on the path of freeing ourselves collectively from their clutches.

I now know the current fee simple land tenure system combined with banking elitism is at the root of a fraudulent pyramid scam that uses force to filter all wealth to the top, leaving the world struggling with induced poverty.

Empowerment of my people if done with love and respect and with love and respect given to settlers as well can go a long way to dislodging the NWO. I can say that in C'imotza our hereditary system is still in control of the land.

If we can set as our goal a method to dislodge the NWO from control over us I am certain we can unite to develop a system of land tenure and banking that takes into account the best interests of both indigenous peoples and settlers.

In time I can see people will become aware of how corporations have given themselves paramouncy over peoples to our detriment as corporations are the vehicles by which common wealth is pyramided into the hands of those who create perpetual conflict for the purpose of fear based manipulation and control.

I am working on my end to make this happen, I call on all to join with us in this movement to unify humanity against those who would control us for their own dark based agenda. Let love be your choice not fear. I have spoken.

The etheric nature of love has long been forgotten in this system but I can say it is now heavily on the rise. With the advent of the Mayan Tzolkin predicted movement of Mother Earth into the Photon Belt and the concomitant rise in human consciousness, it is now impossible for the new world order perps to successfully continue with their M.O. of divide and conquer. The people have had enough of their shenanigans and look for solutions.

Those that are not attached to the energy of the great spirit, who some call the ether or ethos, who are detached, think of themselves as isolated and in need of empowerment. In this case they look for empowerment outside themselves and this form of empowerment always comes at the expense of the disempowerment of others.

Those connected to the ether energy of great spirit will always look inward for their empowerment and will do so in a manner that empowers others. this knowledge will result in new leaders being called forth.

*Morris Amos, or Giltimi, is of the C'imotza Beaver Clan. He is an advisor to Haimus Wakas, who is the Hereditary Chief of the C'imotza Raven Clan. He notes two communities in a part of British Columbia, Canada. One being Kitimat, British Columbia and the other being Kitamaat, British Columbia. Kitimat occupied by the white community. Kitamaat occupied by the Indian or Indigenous community.*

# On Open Societies and Closed Societies with Prof. Imam Syed Soharwardy

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 25, 2018

*Prof. Imam Soharwardy is a Sunni scholar and a shaykh of the Suhrawardi Sufi order, as well as the chairman of the Al-Madinah Calgary Islamic Assembly, founder of Muslims Against Terrorism (MAT), and the founder and president of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada. He founded MAT in Calgary in January 1998. He is also the founder of Islamic Supreme Council of Canada (ISCC).*

*Imam Soharwardy is the founder of the first ever Dar-ul-Aloom in Calgary, Alberta where he teaches Islamic studies. Prof. Soharwardy is the Head Imam at the Al Madinah Calgary Islamic Centre. Imam Soharwardy is a strong advocate of Islamic Tasawuf (Sufism), and believes that the world will be a better place for everyone if we follow what the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (Peace be upon him) has said, "You will not have faith unless you like for others what you like for yourself." He believes that spiritual weakness in humans causes all kinds of problems.*

*Mr. Soharwardy can be contacted at [soharwardy@shaw.ca](mailto:soharwardy@shaw.ca) OR Phone (403)-831-6330.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** With respect to open societies and closed societies, Canada is an open society and a constitutional monarchy, but also a pluralistic, multiethnic, and multifaith, society.

It comes with a lot of complexity. In any open society, any movement on any of the dials of the society in terms of progress or non-progress — in other words, openness or closedness — of the society — starts with dialogue.

What are some 'hot button' things that people are potentially afraid to talk about and is allowing the vacuum of conversation to be filled by the more extreme voices? That may be leading to a more closed society rather than a more open, tolerant one.

**Imam Syed Soharwardy:** In my opinion, in an open society like Canada, people should be allowed to express their opinions. Sometimes, it could be an offensive opinion. Sometimes, it could be a very strong disagreement, but people should be allowed to express or ask what they want to know without persecution or fear of backlash.

An open society, it is also in danger of a certain element of the society taking advantage of the freedom of the society, which it enjoys, and then try to undermine a segment of society, a group of people, by intimidating them, bullying them, and so on.

An open society does not mean people have the open freedom to spread hate against a segment of society. An open society means, what I understand, having an open dialogue, critical discussions, criticizing each other on different topics.

That is absolutely fine. The civil discussion is absolutely fine. What is, in my opinion, in an open society should not be done is causing harm to a segment of society, which may be a small minority of the society; however, they have the equal rights to live in the society with respect.

That is the norm that has to be in place. Otherwise, civil society will not be a civil society. It will be the law of a jungle. Openness does not mean that I cannot question a religion. The openness that, yes, I should be able to question and be able to ask questions. However, I have to have an attitude to get know or understand others, but not to incite or stereotype the whole community of that particular group.

That is what it is. That is the beauty of Canada. In Canada, there is a balance of freedom of expression as well as a responsible society. Sometimes, it leads to abuse. Then there are laws in place to prevent the abuse of this freedom.

I think intolerance increases if we do not allow people to ask questions because when people are oppressed or controlled. They develop the anger in their hearts, in their insides.

There would be a time when the anger comes out and becomes violence. In order to prevent violence, let the people express, so they can have a civil dialogue, I want to add one thing here. If you remember, the cartoonists published the pictures of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

I was the one who took him to the human rights commission. He always says that I took him to the human rights commission because he drew the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which he thought he had the freedom to publish the cartoons.

That is absolutely not my understanding. Yes, he has his view to have his view on what he does not understand. My problem is not that he does not accept my prophet, but it does hurt me when someone portrays and makes fun of my prophet. It hurts.

I understand that the speech that could hurt someone is legal and allowed. I understand that. We should have the tolerance to hear hurt people. When I saw those cartoons, it was not about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It was about the Muslim community to be stereotyped.

Because people have to understand. The Islamic faith is not like today's Christian society, today's Jewish society. The majority of Muslims, even in the 21st century, have a belief in Islam, which is nothing but the sayings and actions of one man.

It is Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Prophet Muhammad is not just one person in the Islamic faith, one prophet in the Islamic faith, or a leader of the Islamic faith. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is Islam.

When someone represents him as a terrorist, which was what the cartoons were about, it means that you are representing the whole religion of Islam as terrorists. That is not acceptable. That is, in my opinion, hate mongering.

That is why I stood up against it; anyone can criticize Islam. We live in a free society. It is absolutely fine. But no right to stereotype a society with hateful, symbolic, barbaric language.

**Jacobsen:** You were also part of the atheist bus campaign in Canada, in small part. What was your role in that? What was your stance on that?

**Soharwardy:** That was my campaign by the way. When I heard the Freethought Society of Canada is running a campaign, I thought that if they have the freedom to express their view about God.

Then I have the same freedom to express my views about God. When I campaign, I spend my own money. Several of my close friends campaigned in Calgary saying, "God does exist and He loves you."

**Jacobsen: [Laughing] This is great. I love that.**

**Soharwardy:** This was our campaign. It was civil. There was no hate. There was no violence. From either side, it ended in a peaceful way, like a Canadian way.

**Jacobsen: [Laughing] That is true. I like that. Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Imam Soharwardy.**



## **A chat with tattoo artist Darrin McDaniel, Sr.**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**May 26, 2018**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When did you first discover a talent in body inking, tattooing?**

**Darrin McDaniel, Sr.:** It was during a state gave vacation, I was drawing portraits then other individuals on vacation asked me to draw up pictures for them to have tattooed.

**Jacobsen: How did you begin to develop this talent and make a living off it? Many people cannot do it. Fewer can make a living off it.**

**McDaniel, Sr.:** My first tattoo was requested because no tattooist felt they could duplicate my drawing provided to them. I cannot say that I am able to rely on tattooing alone. There are still some areas of shading I would like to perfect so I have been seeking apprenticeship programs.

**Jacobsen: What is involved in the technique of tattooing? What is the general process of inking?**

**McDaniel, Sr.:** Moist important technique, I feel, is eliminating infections and using new equipment to lessen risk of an infected tattoo damaging the quality of the ink layed.

**Jacobsen: How do you go about color choice to better match the desired image of the person asking for a tattoo?**

**McDaniel, Sr.:** I have not been requested to do a color portrait or face images. I have been exposed mostly black and grey.

That can always vary; the details and shading change the cost and materials used.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Mr. McDaniel.**

## **In conversation with Ossama Nasrallah — President, Saint Mary's University Students' Association**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**May 29, 2018**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** We are friends and previously colleagues through the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. We had a talk one time about faith and views on the origin, development, and meaning of life... in a hotel lobby, funnily enough. What is your current position vis a vis student unions and CASA?

**Ossama Nasrallah:** I'm currently the President of the Saint Mary's University Students' Association and a member of the National Advocacy Committee at CASA.

**Jacobsen:** Now, does a personal faith or religion guide you?

**Nasrallah:** I'm a Muslim and I believe in God or in our religion's Allah. My faith guides me through the Quran, which is our holy book.

**Jacobsen:** How does this influence personal views on the world and your relationship with the world?

**Nasrallah:** I'm an open minded person and believe in all religions and that's I look at the world in an open eyes and mind. And always looking to learn more about others religions and I respect all of them.

**Jacobsen:** You lived in Kuwait. What is the bigger difference between Kuwait and Canada?

**Nasrallah:** Canada is more open minded than Kuwait that is the biggest difference, other than that I was treated the same on both countries with respect.

**Jacobsen:** I appreciate taking the time, by the way. Do you have anything else that you would like to mention regarding science, faith, life, and personal views on them?

**Nasrallah:** I believe that love should be our religion and we should all respect each other's religions.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Ossama.

# Interview with the Co-Founder of Atheist Alliance — Middle-East and North Africa & United Atheists of Europe

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 1, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** What are the tasks and responsibilities that come with running a Europe-wide atheist organization?

**Karrar Al Asfoor:** We need to bring the atheist communities in Europe together, different languages and different countries, geo-political and minor cultural differences.

It is not easy to run a continent-wide organization and it carries tough tasks and huge responsibilities, one of the major issues is the funding and this issue does not only affect us but the whole atheist community in general, we will try to come over it by an innovative workaround and find solutions to it.

We also need to be dedicated and active to achieve the required results and this is also another issue because we all have our own personal responsibilities, but once our team grows the needed efforts will be distributed among us.

**Jacobsen:** What are some atheist organizations who you coordinate and collaborate with now?

**Asfoor:** As “United Atheists of Europe” we are not yet in coordination or collaboration with any other organizations, but as an individual activist I collaborate with many organizations like Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (CEMB), ex-Muslims of Norway, Atheist refugee relief and Polish atheist Kazimierz Lyszczyński Foundation and many more.

**Jacobsen:** Who are some bright lights in the European atheist community?

**Asfoor:** I believe that every atheist activist is important and everyone works from their position but if I have to specify names I would say Maryam Namazie, Nina Sankari, and Michael Nugent.

**Jacobsen:** Can you recommend some primer books for young atheists?

**Asfoor:** For young atheists I would not recommend books, our era is different from the past and we are living in a fast-paced world that require us to get things done faster, time is important and we need to use it perfectly, for example you can spend two hours of your time watching a film and that's much shorter time from the time needed for reading a novel.

In terms of recommendations for young atheists, I would recommend the philosophy series from crash course channel on YouTube, philosophy makes the individual “thinker” rather than copy-cat, it helps improve our thinking and reasoning abilities and help us reach the correct conclusions without logical fallacies, once we know how to use our minds the possibilities then are countless and we may even tackle some subjects that science never deal with.

**Jacobsen:** How can people become involved in the organization?

**Asfoor:** We welcome every atheist to join us weather European or not, ex-Muslim or from other religious background, people may contact me or Nacer Ameri directly on our social media accounts or they can send a message to “United Atheists of Europe” page on facebook.

**Jacobsen:** What are some means b my which individuals can donate to and help the atheist community grow in Europe?

**Asfoor:** There are many means to donate to different atheist organizations in Europe, our fraternity is one of them, even though we are not yet officially receiving donations and our website is not yet live but if someone wants to donate to us they can directly talk to me or Nacer.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Karrar.

**Asfoor:** It is such an honor for me to participate in this interview with you, many thanks, Scott.

## Surrey, British Columbia, Canada Pastor and Wife Charged with 28 Accounts of Sexual Assault

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 8, 2018

According to the *Vancouver Sun*, one couple, a pastor and a wife, of a Surrey, British Columbia, Canada church are face about 2 dozen charges related to sexual assault.

In May, the couple were arrested. However, the charges were only filed recently to cover the period from 2015 to 2017. The couple were released from the Surrey RCMP after arrest, but under “strict conditions” based on the reportage.

The media release states that Samuel Emerson, aged 34, from the Cloverdale Christian Fellowship Church was charged with 13 counts of sexual assault. He is the pastor of said church.

“11 counts of being in a position of authority and touching a person for a sexual purpose and one count of sexual touching of a person under the age of 16,” according to the *Vancouver Sun*.

Mr. Emerson’s wife, Madelaine Emerson, aged 37, was charged with one count of sexual assault, another of having been in an authority position and touching someone for a sexual purpose, as well as another for threats to cause death or bodily harm.

The Emersons have five children together. They were involved in the youth ministry for children. This was not known to the police before.

The article stated, “As of Thursday afternoon, Randy and Christine Emerson were listed as senior pastors on the church’s website and there was no mention of Samuel, but his social media accounts still list him as a pastor at the church. Samuel is Randy and Christine’s son.”

Samuel is no longer an employee of the church. In addition, there has been a drastic decline in the membership of the church since May of 2018. Mr. and Mrs. Emerson were arrested on May 18.

Randy Emerson said, “If you know us and our church please pray. We are under attack like never before and we need the accuser of the saints to be silenced and Truth prevail.”

Two days later, Randy Emerson stated:

*Thank you to everyone who is praying for us and expressing love at this time. You are making a difference. This is a time when we must not believe with our eyes and ears but with our spirits. Let God be true and every man a liar. Can’t be specific at this time but your prayers are making a difference. Thanks and much love, Randy.*

One media release explained how the Surrey RCMP investigators believe other victims exist who have not come forward to the police.

Cpl. stated, “Calling the police to report a sexual assault is a very difficult thing to do especially when the suspect is someone you knew and trusted, and can leave lifelong emotional scars... Our highly skilled investigators take sexual assaults very seriously, and, supported by our Surrey RCMP Victim Services workers, are here to listen and provide emotional support.”

Information on victims can be provided to the Surrey RCMP at 604-599-0502. Those who wish to remain anonymous can contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS or [www.solvecrime.ca](http://www.solvecrime.ca).

# **Journey Canada Event Cancelled Over Anti-LGBTQ+ Concerns**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**June 8, 2018**

The *Canadian Press* reported on a Saint John, New Brunswick retreat. It is a Christian retreat from a well-known controversial Christian group. It is known as Journey Canada. It was providing an intensive retreat.

It was going to be hosted at the Villa Madonna Retreat House owned by the Catholic Diocese of Saint John. Journey Canada works through the retreats to heal the “relationally and sexually broken.”

Some consider this “nothing more than conversion therapy” The St. Thomas University Professor of Sociology, Erin Fredericks, stated, that the approach is reckless.

That is, it can lead to anxiety, self-harm, and PTSD. Following public groups’ concerns, the event was cancelled Wednesday afternoon by the diocese.

# Bill Donahue Talks About Anthony Bourdain's Suicide

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 8, 2018

The *Friendly Atheist* reported on the death of Anthony Bourdain. In particular, the popular response by the Catholic League through the spokesperson named Bill Donahue.

Only a few hours since the death of Anthony Bourdain; Bill Donahue used the “tragedy to promote his own beliefs.” Bourdain did not, as far as we know, adhere to a formal religious faith.

Bourdain grew up in a mixed-faith home with a Jewish mother and a Catholic father. However, Bourdain talked about being “raised without religion.” Bourdain stated that he felt an instinctive hostility to devotions.

That any form of certainty became an enemy with doubt and self-questioning as important to him. He would question the nature of the world regularly. Bourdain was a fan of the also late Christopher Hitchens.

Donahue argued, “If Anthony Bourdain had been a religious man, would he have killed himself? Probably not...” Bourdain committed suicide; he killed himself.

“Bourdain was raised by his Catholic father and Jewish mother, though neither of them saw fit to raise him in any religion,” Donahue continued, “In 2011, he said his views on religion were similar to those expressed by Christopher Hitchens, the British atheist. This is why the atheist organization, Freedom From Religion Foundation, was so proud of him.”

Donahue remarks that the substance abuse of Bourdain was the main driver. However, he plugs the book, *The Catholic Advantage: How Health, Happiness, and Heaven Await the Faithful*, which is a book by Donahue himself.

He argues, “...there is an inverse relationship between religiosity and suicide: those who are regular churchgoers have a much lower rate of suicide than atheists like Bourdain.”

The *Friendly Atheist* responded, “Donohue, as you’d expect, doesn’t understand what the data shows. Casting logic aside and believing in God *will not cure an addiction or prevent suicide*.”

That is, the involvement in things such as a community with a tight social support network for people whom one can call on in times of need become the main preventative of self-harming behaviours and even suicide.

In other words, a church or a religious group, or religion generally, is not the only solution. *Friendly Atheist* stated, “An atheist group, a sorority, a sports team, a improv group, etc. can all serve those purposes... Let’s not forget that studies have also shown how increased religiosity leads to higher rates of suicide for LGBTQ people, and the same holds true in different parts of the world.”

This seems, by the analysis of the article, like the use of a national idol tragedy via suicide to promote a conservative and religious agenda.

## Young Woman Shamed for Having a Period at Catholic High School

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 9, 2018

*Friendly Atheist* spoke on a young woman who was shamed. She is 22-years-old now. Ashlie Juarbe is the young woman. When she attended a Catholic high school, one male teacher publicly shamed her for having a period.

This guilt-trip was reported in *New School Free Press*, as follows:

“Ashlie, I said you’re up.” He was at the foot of my desk, the overhead light glinted off his bald head. I feared my jeans were stained.

“I’m not feeling well, Mr. Cooper. I’d like to sit this one out,” I said. I started to sweat again. There was no way Mr. Cooper would let me go up there if he understood. I hoped God would give him a sign.

“Ashlie...”

“But Mr. Cooper, I have...” I began, but his eyes were daring me to sit a second longer. I looked at my classmates, still the words “my period” wouldn’t tumble out. For a normal phenomenon that has over 5,000 slang terms, it was never talked about in public without hushed tones and uncomfortable faces. Going to an all-girls religious high school was worse. Talking about anything below your waist was blasphemy. If it wasn’t virtuous, it wasn’t taught.

Juarbe felt humiliated. Mr. Cooper did permit going to the bathroom. However, she only went after the guilt, shame, and public humiliation over the period.

Juarbe stated, “Mr. Cooper made me ashamed of menstruating. There was no easy way of becoming a woman, especially when the institution that promised to educate you failed to mention the word “vagina,” because it wasn’t respectable for the students. At an all-girls high school, it should have been easier to teach us about health, about our bodies. But it wasn’t.”

This began a journey for Juarbe into transitioning into an atheism. She began to realize the problems for women with menstruation are worldwide. Women are seen as objects of family honor, of shame, and in need of feeling dirty for natural bodily functions — a period.

Girls and women need sanitary pads. If not, and of course for other reasons as well, the girls and women around the world can lose access to education. They cannot stay in school.

There is, happily, a Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28th. Juarbe’s, and other girls’ and women’s, stories are important to bear in mind in order to raise awareness about the problems face by girls and women over regular bodily functions part and parcel of adolescent development and adult life.



# On Faith, Men, and Masculinity with Mr. Melvin Lars

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 18, 2018

*Mr. Melvin Lars is a native of Bossier City/Shreveport, Louisiana; he received several undergraduate and graduate academic degrees from various universities; La. Tech. (BS) Univ. & Centenary (Admin. Cert.) College) in Louisiana, Texas (Tx. Southern (MA) Univ), Michigan (Eastern, Mi Univ, & Saginaw Valley St. Univ.) and has done extensive educational studies in Ohio (Youngstown (Supt., cert.) St Univ) and California (Los Angeles, (CA. cert) City College).*

*Lars is a certified Violence Prevention/Intervention Specialist, receiving his certification and training through the prestigious Harvard University, with Dr. Renee Prothro-Stith.*

*He is a licensed/ordained Elder/Minister in both the C.O.G.I.C. & C.M.E. Churches. He is the CEO/founder of Brighter Futures Inc; a Family Wellness, Violence Prevention/Intervention and Academic Enhancement and entertainment Company; an affiliate representative for the NFL ALLPRODADS Initiative. Former interim; Executive Director of Urban League of Greater Muskegon, Former NAACP President of Muskegon County; 2007–2012, employed as a consultant to the Michigan Department of Education as a Compliance Monitor for the (NCLB Highly Qualified) initiative for Highly Qualified Teachers and works collaboratively with Hall of Famer Jim Brown and his Amer-I-Can Program and is a ten-time published author of various books, and self-help and academic articles. He is married to Ann Lars and is the father of one adult son, Ernest. Here we talk about intergenerational communication in an uncensored and educational series.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** There is the Old Testament and the New Testament in Christianity. There is the idea of the stoic male. What passages are referenced when talking about the male role in a Christian context?

**Melvin Lars:** I want to start with something that may offend men. I use the passage: “Man should love his wife as God loves the church.” That trumps everything, when we talk about procreation, when we talk about how to treat our brother, and when we talk about the Golden Rule.

Even though, one may not be married. One does understand. We are supposed to love our wives the way God loved the church. We know that God told Peter, “Upon this rock, I will build my church.”

We know: Peter was not talking about a physical rock, however; he was referencing a solid foundation upon which men could place themselves. When we start to discuss Man’s interpretation of God’s Word, we should start with loving our wives as God loves the church.

I would go back to the beginning, in Genesis it talks about how Man was created, God spoke the world into existence, it talks about God felt that Adam needed a help meet, he put Adam to sleep removed one of his ribs and fashioned a woman.

We, as men, take the Bible and twist it. This assertion will anger many theologians, it angers Bible scholars and parishioners. Too often, people who consider themselves experts in the Word of God twist the words of the Bible to fit the conversation, in order to have the discussion to go in the direction that makes them comfortable and is best suited for them.

When you cite specific scriptures, it is opened to individual interpretation. I will be honest with you, Scott. I am careful about citing specific scriptures. There are so many interpretations and as a result, people begin to argue *about* the Bible rather than *discuss* the Bible.

When you start to pinpoint specific scripture, that is [Laughing] when the arguments start between people. I tend to generalize, when one generalizes, one has the opportunity to share more openly. Then it is not left to interpretation because of one word or phrase.

We know the Bible was written in several languages. The languages are not the same, especially English. They do not mean the same. Being American, and being honest and blunt, the Bible has been often times been taken out of context and interpreted incorrectly.

In far too many instances it was not interpreted properly into the English language. Some of the things, words, and phrases are not the same as in the Hebrew language, etc. I talk about the Bible in generalizations rather than through the citation of specific scriptures in order to engage individuals in a discussion rather than to attempt to show some misinformed expertise of God's word.

For example, I took French in high school, the mere structure of the language is drastically different from the English language, thus causing confusion and the mis pronunciation of words, phrases and sentence structure. I took Spanish in high school as well and it presented the same frustrations and complications, I cannot speak it well at all. When you look at it, linguistically, it is different.

Many things are misinterpreted. I took the position of sharing the generalized thoughts. You have the Bible scholars who shape it. They make the Bible say what they want the Bible to say to the congregation. This does not permit people the opportunity to think, nor to interpret it.

Instead, people will say, "You have to have faith. You have to believe." I think that in and of itself is open to question simply because there is no defining, causation of complete understanding relative to; "faith and "belief."

**Jacobsen: With respect to the outcomes of the common interpretations of the Bible in North America, there are outcomes. Men take on a stoic persona. They deny feelings. Because they think the denial of their feelings makes them a better, stronger man.**

**When, in fact, they are probably harming their psychological and emotional lives. Because they are denying basic emotions and creating an internal conflict by implication.**

**Lars:** Absolutely, my angle on this, Scott. I love the question. Although, you fashioned the question in the form of a statement.

When you see men with these stoic attitude, and this pretentious since of being disconnected emotionally, I love to ask them a few simple questions; "If you feel that in order to display your prowess as a man, and that you should be stoic, and not show emotions; Why do you have that beer? Why do you have that whiskey? Why do you smoke the cigar? Why do you use tobacco?"

All of the aforementioned are ways of self-medicating. Evidently, I am speaking to the men who think that those actions personifies them as a being real man. Evidently, you do not believe it. Otherwise, you would not need the whiskey.

You would not need the bourbon. You would not need the beer. You would not need the tobacco. Because, all of these foreign substances are used to replace something that is obviously missing

in their lives. In essence, they are showing emotion. Even though, it may not show on the physical face, but inside, the emotions are racing out of control.

There is a false persona. A false persona of not showing emotions, where the face appears emotionless — as if able to handle any difficulty.

**Jacobsen: How does this impact boys and adolescent men watching adult men with this false persona?**

**Lars:** It damages them greatly. It damages the young men and young boys more than the old men. The old men do not want to admit it. Any of us who are honest with ourselves understand that the loss of a loved one, the disappointment on the job or a sought after career, even a young lady who we have interest in and who does not have interest in us can be devastating.

As an example, if one is preparing for an exam, he spends three weeks burning the midnight oil studying for it. Then he barely has successful outcome *if the outcome was successful*.

All those emotions come spilling out. When you are a young man or a boy being told by older guys, “You should not show emotions, suck it up and come back next time.” That may sound good in theory, however; What do you do until “next time”?

**Jacobsen: [Laughing].**

**Lars:** [Laughing] Many times, you put your best foot forward. You go back and redo what you have already done. Many times, there is no one to say, “Okay, let’s try it this way and do this to enhance what you did last time.”

Many times, you are left with a statement, “Go back and do it again, or you didn’t put in enough time.” However, all these things are theoretical. Being a young man and being a young boy, you want to be the person your “father is proud of” or the male next door.

It causes inner destruction, which is unnecessary. Men should be honest and say, “I am with you. I support you. I understand that you did what you thought was correct. Let me see if I can share something with you that may improve the process next time.”

**Jacobsen: What if we make this more concrete? I mean this across all groups. You see in these trends in popular culture, e.g. media, music, and so on. Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, the shoot ’em up gruesome images. These hyper-masculine Marvel comic movies. The guys who want to be the tough Western cowboy or the Hip-Hop and Rap thug.**

**Of course, the women are subordinate. They are the fainting couch woman or nothing but a booty — a “badonkadonk.” These popular representations or outcomes the young men take from listening to or watching older men. They create the false persona own culture from the examples around them — Asian, Black, Native American, and White men with false personas and so unhealthy role modelling.**

**How do we work to open the conversation to alleviate some of the unhealthier aspects of it? Because some great art comes out of it. At the same time, some unhealthy aspects come out of it.**

**Lars:** Excellent question! It is a bunch of pseudo-crap.

**Jacobsen: [Laughing].**

**Lars:** [Laughing] Why is it a bunch of pseudo-crap? Because, if have your tough cowboys, and/or the tough thugs, what do they do? They use a foreign substance to gain ‘strength.’ I.e., alcohol, whiskey, cocaine, marijuana, etc. As much as I loved the *Black Panther*, he had to take a substance to materialize into this character.

The cowboys, you have to be this tough guy. You have to ask, “Barkeep, give me a whiskey” [Laughing]. You got to have courage from the alcohol. Sylvester Stallone, you are eating raw eggs, which are supposed to enhance your strength and stamina.

**Jacobsen:** [Laughing].

**Lars:** [Laughing] It is all a bunch of pseudo-crap, Scott. Unfortunately, human beings, especially the male human being, are not confident in ourselves. Because you know your flaws and vulnerabilities. Whereby now, you have to put on this façade of perfection.

Someone who has no weaknesses rather than: “I am learning, I’m still learning, and I have made some mistakes. I made some decision that were not the best.” At the end of the day, we must remain careful about making people think that everything is about dominating somebody else.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Lars.

# On Theology and Health with Mr. Melvin Lars

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 19, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Before we were talking about theology and masculinity, this time, we will talk about men's health issues and men talking about them. Lars, you were on a talk show years prior. You talked about one of the most serious health issues for someone.

**You had cancer. They have to meet an oncologist because they have cancer. Mine in this culture do not talk about minor health issues. Yet, you took the time and courage on a talk show in public to talk about a major and potentially life threatening health issue.**

**Why did you go on a public talk show to talk about this? What was the health issue in more detail?**

**Melvin Lars:** The reason for going public was because of our male pseudo crap [Laughing]. I, like most males, ignored symptoms. They were severe. I had a rash. It did not cure itself. I talked to a friend who is a physician. He thought it might be a food allergy.

They found this to be leukemia. It was the white blood cells and lack of red blood cells. The rest was history. I wanted to talk about it. I wanted to inspire others. It had nothing to do with how masculine or tough I was. I could bench press 500 pounds or more, I could squat 600 pounds or more and I was the picture of health.

I was successful as a coach, I worked every day, I would see red while driving at night, I assumed that the automobile ahead of me was putting on their brakes. Unfortunately, blood was leaking into my eyes. The red that I was seeing was my own blood.

I want to inspire men to be more conscious of their bodies and to get assistance with questionable health concerns.

**Jacobsen:** What seems like the reason for “pseudocrap”? In this particular branch of pseudocrap, the not talking about health complications from a rash to blood leaking in one's eye.

**Lars:** Scott, with the whole process as men, we do not whine, complain. We do not talk about uncomfortable things. Those “unmanly” things. That, in and of itself, is a detriment to men and young boys getting in touch with their realities and they have a tendency to develop this sense of invincibility.

Because we do not control what happens in the atmosphere, we do not control what happens to our bodies. Acute promyelocytic leukemia is a very rare form of leukemia and there is no known treatment for it. As the oncologist and I discussed this ailment and its causes, the oncologist stated; “We do not know what causes it, we theorize that it may be caused by stress.”

My only options were to adhere to several experimental procedures or basically return home to die. We began receiving chemotherapy and was in and out of cancer treatment centers for approximately two years. Unfortunately, the chemotherapy did not work, the leukemia would appear to be in remission for short periods of time before returning. However; it was only my faith and believing in a higher power, that is allowing us to have this conversation today.

None of the experiments worked. I was told. I would not see my 40th birthday. Evidently, they did not consult with God. I am 65. I turned 65 yesterday. From a male's perspective, we cause more physical and mental damage to young boys and young men with all of this false machismo.

**Jacobsen: One of the conversations arising in the public discussion more now. It comes in various forms. It comes in the form of youth, especially young men, who commit suicide and “succeed” more at it. Young women attempt suicide more.**

**However, with the focus on young men, there are veterans who come back from war. They acquire shell shock or PTSD, or conditions around it. That relates to the public health conversation. It not only deals with the body but also the mind.**

**Veterans, young men, and other suffer from depression, suicidal tendencies, and other things. For instance, they may be mildly schizophrenic, where, in a normal context, most people most of the time will interpret the situation accurately.**

**However, these individuals will process the information in a slightly wrong way. So, they get the wrong interpretations. They behave inappropriately based on the wrong interpretation or wrong processing of information.**

**How do we then have those conversations around mental health apart from a conversation around physical health?**

**Lars:** That is an interesting issue. We see mental health as a weakness. We see it as a flaw. Unfortunately, in a world of both men and women who perceive themselves to be this strong, invincible human specimen any form of perceived weakness is viewed as being flawed. They see mental health as a negative “human trait” in the individual.

With PTSD sufferers who are veterans, no one ever discusses the fact, that, these problems were pre-war. Most of the individuals — and I am not a therapist, if there were extensive psychological studies done on individuals before they were allowed to go into the military, there would be many more people being seen as “unfit” for the military.

Because of the potential damage done to the individual, but also to others if and when they are subjected to having to stay alive by dodging bullets and mortars/causing the death of someone else. Mental disabilities and other less accepted human frailties are things people do not want to talk about it.

One of my cousins, who is now a police officer did not pass the psychological aspect of the exam. However, he got a second chance to take the exam. This time [Laughing], he passes the exam. I think, “If he is psychologically disqualified the first time, then he will be psychologically disqualified the second time.”

He will remember the questions and know not to answer the questions honestly. That is an atrocity and endangers provides a “war-zone” giving a green light to people that may ultimately hurt themselves and others. The psychological problem was already there.

So do we just bury our collective heads in the sand and refuse to care, ignore the sight that is right before our eyes? What about our military? No one wants to discuss the true reality of the situation. I will preface with this. One of the most irresponsible things people continually do is to ignore the signs of mental illness, disregard those that cannot help themselves, your congress and senate persons refuses to pass legislation to assist veteran homelessness, veterans health care, veteran joblessness not to mention; veteran suicides (22 suicides per day is being committed by

veterans) rates, and then have the audacity to insult their intelligence was some empty self-serving statement as if they are paying homage to the military, by stating, “Thank you for the service.”

It is an empty, wasted statement. You are talking about somebody putting their life on the line every day. Then when you watch the Senate, especially here in the United States, and Congress with bills being proposed for military assistance, many of them are not passed on the Senate floor.

You have the audacity to tell people, “Thank you for your service.” Then we do not want to pay them any money. This is a huge problem, as we talk about people being vulnerable with PTSD and mental illness. They commit suicide. Society has caused in individuals through constant bullying.

We have damaged people with the constant bullying. They feel, “I cannot live up to the expectations. I might as well take my own life.”

**Jacobsen: Often, the men filtered into the military will be poor. The poor men tend to be minority men. It exacerbates already extant problems. Not only for men but also communities.**

**Lars:** Yes, as you shared the question, Scott, the warmongers in the office. People try to get angry with the messenger. If you have ever noticed, Scott, 99% of the people talking about being pro-war. They are never in the military.

You cannot get them to go to war. There is something to be said about it. This patriotism and dying for the country. If I make the statement and am not willing to do it, what does this say about me? This is why you have so many men confused, who take their own lives.

They do not know how they will stack up. I always say, “Careful who you listen to.” We have a leader in this country who dodged military service all of his life. He has the audacity to talk about “being tough.”

That is where people need to be careful. They need to be careful when they vilify and talk about these young men being weak and not being good patriots. All that foolishness. When the person doing all the talking, they were the quintessential coward.

**Jacobsen: Some of this. In this conversation, I see two streams. One stream is the idea that there is historical inertia: men need to fill the military. Men feeling as if they need to be part of the military. It is almost like an unconscious historical inertia.**

**I see another stream. Those who find a political benefit to themselves to make appropriate statements, for themselves, about national pride, military pride, saving the world, and so on. Usually, they or their children will not go into the military.**

**They have the option, or the finances, to not have to go into the military. It is not an individual and familial risk for them. It may not be for them an aggressive thing. It may be them not reflecting on what they’re saying, something reflective.**

**If someone talks about patriot love and having national pride, what are the symbols? The military, the police, the administration — Republican or Democratic, these become markers of someone who is a true American, a real American.**

Those who may be conscientious objectors become anti-Americans. Someone saying this. It comes with certain benefits — in many cases, it seems. If they keep saying them, they become like the *Lord's Prayer* or the *Nicene Creed*.

“I do not know what to pray about today. So, I will say the *Lord's Prayer*.” It becomes, “I am simply saying it.” In other words, “I am reflexively and not necessarily consciously saying and stating things that, to me, feel like truisms and feel good to say them because they have come with rewards prior.” They get an A on the patriot test.

**Lars:** You have stated very well, exactly what I am talking about. It is why I call it pseudo-crap. Because it is a conditioned response. Again, I am not a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, or psychologist, it is like the experiment of Pavlov with the dog. The bell rings, the dog thinks it's dinner time and begins to salivates.

It is a conditioned response. I agree with you wholeheartedly. Scott, it is like the bully on the playground. The bully on the playground knows who to pick a fight with. The bully looks for the attention of other people.

Even though, he or she pretends to be tough. He or she looks for attention from the people standing around watching and applauding. However, when it is their turn to fight, they will not fight, but they will try to talk others into fighting.

All of these people doing this big-bad, tough talking are just talk and no action. I will be very frank with you, man. My family is filled with military individuals. Two nephews retired, recently, my son was in the military. (I was not in the military). Several uncles and aunts, were also in the military; I see and hear over and over about the devastating mental and physical affects that they continue to endure as a direct result of having served in the military.

I hear people with means talking about how much of a patriot they are themselves. However, they are never in the military. They do not take the chance. They let someone else take the chance. So, they can continue to enjoy their lifestyles, wave their flags and fool themselves into believing that they are the epitome of patriotism. That is the biggest hypocrisy in the world, as I see it.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Lars.



# Humanism and AI

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 20, 2018

The modern technological landscape continues to alter. The world with it. There has been use of the term “Humanism” to describe the orientation of giant technological companies in the development of artificial intelligence.

The *Washington Post* stated, “Tom Gruber of Apple describes Siri as “humanistic AI — artificial intelligence designed to meet human needs by collaborating [with] and augmenting people.”

Satya Nadella, who is the Chief Executive of Microsoft, said, “Human-centered AI can help create a better world.” In short, the rhetoric around artificial intelligence amounts to the utilization of the terms “humanism” and “humanistic,” or “human-centered,” to substantiate the mission of the AI development.

The *Washington Post* argues the terms such as the aforementioned emerge in the conversation around the bringing of humanity together. However, some important points come in the form of the rhetorical aspect and the connection to the reality of it.

“The word “human” crops up in conversations across the technology industry, but it’s not always clear what it means — assuming it means anything at all,” the article opines, “Intuitively comprehensible, it sounds nonthreatening, especially in contrast to alienating jargon such as ‘machine learning.’”

The orientation of the larger companies is proposed to be for ergonomics. The development of technologies by and for human needs and wants. This becomes the basis for the use, even abuse, of the terms humanistic, argues the article.

“But calling the results “humanistic” is ultimately rhetorical sleight of hand that suggests much and means little. Unless these companies reconsider their underlying approach, their words will remain empty,” the reportage continued, “Among the big tech companies, Google has voiced the clearest expression of the idea of humanistic AI. In March, Li, chief scientist for AI research at Google Cloud, penned a New York Times op-ed.”

Google did not renew the Department of Defense contract and set forth ethical guidelines for the development of technologies not for weapons. AI weapons would be a bad future, a non-positive for humans future.

However, is this the case? Does the non-renewal of the contract and the orientation of the technological curve make for a humanistic technology movement?

The *Washington Post* explained, “Consider computer vision, a type of AI that was key to Project Maven (and is central to self-driving cars). Photographic images from cameras mounted on drones are widely used to gather visual evidence and provide forensic truth value for military decision-makers.”

The work requires a huge amount of human labor to make sense of the information collected. There are many cases in which a drone has misidentified a target. The question is the human value framework.

Although, as a small interjection, people have different values from one another. Thus, the conception of a single human-values framework implies a universalization of human values.

What if these human-values and humanistic values purported to represent all humankind simply reflect the orientations of the billionaires and technology companies?

# Trouble for Construction in Fredericton, New Brunswick

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 20, 2018

According to *CBC News*, there are some ongoing and upcoming headaches for the Fredericton folks based on the summer road construction.

The general manager of the business improvement organization talked about the scrambling for some of the owners of some of the companies. They have been cut from business due to the construction going on, which is causing a loss of income for some of the business owners.

Bruce McCormack, General Manager of Downtown Fredericton Inc., talked about the ways in which the City of Fredericton have not been able to communicate with the local businesses in an effective way.

“He said they could have better planned around the periods of congested traffic and loss of parking spaces if given sufficient notice when the intersection at Regent and Queen streets was closing,” *CBC News* stated.

The city failed to provide sufficient notice to the businesses in Fredericton. They suffered for it.

“We realize that construction has to work and we need that infrastructure, so we’re willing to work with the city, but we need to know the information,” McCormack opined, “There’s got to be a balance.”

The construction will cost the restaurant owners about \$100,000 in total. Fredericton has 22 main construction initiatives ongoing including the renewal of the sewer mains in St. Anne’s Point Boulevard.

This will close a main part of the city for 11 weeks. The article continued, “City engineer John Lewis outlined five more major construction projects — Smythe Street, Forest Hill Road, Lincoln Road, Riverside Drive and Sunset Drive — that will take place over the next several weeks.”

# Public Schools in Saskatchewan Update

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 26, 2018

*Global News* reported on the public school boards in Saskatchewan.

The Public Schools of Saskatchewan wants a larger discussion on the future of education. This is stated as being needed after the ruling from the year before regarding the funding through the province of non-Catholic students who attend the Catholic schools.

The article stated, “In the Theodore case, a judge ruled the Saskatchewan government’s funding of non-Catholic students at Catholic schools violated the state’s duty of religious neutrality under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, along with equality rights.”

The association sent an appeal. Now, the provincial government continues to use the notwithstanding clause of the charter to permit the continued funding practices already in place.

The Executive Director of the Public Schools of Saskatchewan Norm Dray stated, “Bill 89 essentially says that in order to maintain the current funding practice, our government is willing to ignore the two sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms identified in the court ruling but also three sections of the Human Rights Code of Canada.”

He, on behalf of the organization, thinks that the Theodore decision uses an extraordinary circumstance to warrant the provincial government work outside of both the human rights code and the charter. Strong words.

Now, the government is looking to transition the non-Catholic students into the public school. This is according to the public section chair, Bonnie Hope.

Hope explained, “Now that we have a decision that clearly defines the mandate of separate schools in Saskatchewan, we believe resolution of this issue required nothing more than goodwill and attention to what’s in the best interests of students in the long term... We need to talk about this now so our vision for the future of education in our province is clear.”

The Public Schools of Saskatchewan would like to see the full conclusion of the legal process in order to shift efforts for the strengthening of an inclusive public education system.

There are about 10,000 non-Catholic students in the Catholic schools in Saskatchewan. The government of Saskatchewan said that the permission of the decision to stand may jeopardize the funding for the other faith-based schools in the area.

The article concluded, “Under the charter’s notwithstanding clause, a government can override portions of the charter for a five-year period.”

# PEN America Chief Executive Response to Murders

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 29, 2018

PEN released a short statement. There was an attack on the Capital Gazette newsroom. PEN, for those who may not know, is an organization devoted to the human right of freedom of expression around the world.

They champion the writers and others like them around the world. Words have power, if taken in... one word at a time.

The American Chief Executive, Suzanne Nossel stated that the organization was “devastated” to hear about the murder of those in the US newsroom.

Nossel stated:

*Word that dedicated journalists, editors, and staff were killed and wounded while at work in a community newsroom sends shockwaves through our country. It is a devastating reminder of the acts of everyday courage entailed in reporting the news faithfully, knowing that the impact and reverberation of stories may be impossible to predict or control. At a time of incessant attacks on journalists from the White House, including repeated declarations that the media is an “enemy of the American people,” citizens must mobilize in defense of those willing to take the risks necessary to report stories we need to hear. PEN America mourns alongside the surviving staff of the Capital Gazette as well as all the families and friends of those targeted and the many thousands of readers who will suffer from the impact of this unspeakable tragedy. The determination and bravery of the Capital Gazette team in publishing the paper as usual this morning is an inspiration to all of us to rise up to safeguard the institution of the press that needs and deserves our unflinching defense.*

## In Conversation with Maya Bahl on Different Definitions of Race

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 31, 2018

*Maya Bahl is an editor and contributor to The Good Men Project with me. She has an interest and background in forensic anthropology. As it turns out, I hear the term race thrown into conversations in both conservative and progressive circles. At the same time, I wanted to know the more scientific definitions used by modern researchers including those in forensic anthropology. Then I asked Bahl about conducting an educational series. Here we are, part one.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** You and I work together at *The Good Men Project*. Both as contributors and editors, we talked about various topics off the record. One arose based on interest in forensic anthropology for you.

The topic was race. However, the idea of “race” in common parlance, in sociological verbiage, and in forensic anthropology, for starters, differ from one another. What seems like the common definition of race?

**Maya Bahl:** I do firstly appreciate our friendship Scott, that we can have a friendly conversation at a whim and still grow as contributors and editors at The Good Men Project!

In anthropology, race is seen as the groupings of people by physical or social qualities and sociology sees it as a direct difference in biological traits in a group, but in the end the fact would remain that race at a basic level is the distinguishing of groups of people against an observed pre-conceived standard. This standard was a bit stricter, and racist in terminology, at the time when the fields of Anthropology and Sociology began — as the terms “Caucasoid”, “Negroid”, and “Mongoloid” were only used in classifying peoples from Europe, Africa, and Asia. Since the 1800s on though, the world has thankfully been a lot more tolerant of its classifications — though we still have much work to do on this end!

**Jacobsen:** How does the common definition of race differ from the forensic anthropology definition of race?

**Bahl:** In forensics, certain physical qualities of a group or individual is important and necessary in then identifying them in getting the big picture, whether its immediate in law enforcement/criminal situations or ongoing as a student in the Forensics discipline. The common definition of race as a distinguisher of an individual or group is much more generalized, and as a result in my opinion, could be taken in the wrong way in different scenarios.

**Jacobsen:** How does this definition, even further, differ from the biological construct of species?

**Bahl:** Race and the Biological Construct of Species as ideas dovetails with each other, as both reflect on the assumptions that are set about a group or individual. In my opinion however, the biological construct of species is more assumed, so that there’s an expected outcome without any variance, whereas in race, variations could still be made.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Maya.

# On Skepticism, Faith, and Tactics with Claire Klingenberg

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 1, 2018

*Claire has a background in law and psychology, and is currently working on her degree in Religious Studies. She has been involved in the skeptic movement since 2013 as co-organizer of the Czech Paranormal Challenge. Since then, she has consulted on various projects, where woo & belief meets science. Claire has spoken at multiple science&skepticism conferences and events. She also organized the European Skeptics Congress 2017, and both years of the Czech March for Science.*

*Her current activities include chairing the European Council of Skeptical Organisations, running the “Don’t Be Fooled” project (which provides free critical thinking seminars to interested high schools), contributing to the Czech Religious Studies journal Dingir, as well as to their online news in religion website. In her free time, Claire visits various religious movements to understand better what draws people to certain beliefs.*

*Claire lives in Prague, Czech Republic, with her partner, and dog.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is a problem of the skeptics’ movement?**

**Claire Klingenberg:** The skeptic movement is caught at the moment in the idea that it is by skeptics and for skeptics. It is comfortable to live in our bubble. However, we will not get far if we are afraid to talk to people with a very different opinion.

It is important to find a common platform to discuss things. Otherwise, we will not be able to evolve if we do not talk to people with an opposite opinion. It is our duty to speak respectfully with people who are believers and even people who are conspiracy theorists [Laughing].

Even if their conspiracy has direct consequences, it is not simply about the people we are talking with, but the people who are hearing the conversation. If we look to dogmatic, aggressive, and if we stay within our comfort zone, we won’t attract the in-between people, all the people between the skeptics and the other extremes, believers, conspiracy theorists. I think it is really important that we invite speakers from different belief groups to our meetings, or hold talks with them.

Of course, those talks have to be moderated to make sure the conversation stays respectful. That is something we skeptics really have to work on.

**Jacobsen: What has been one lesson taken from someone who holds a faith that has something you have not considered before?**

**Klingenberg:** I study religion. I study comparative religion. One of my professors, who has greatly influenced my thought, is a Christian. From him, I learned to respect people with widely opposite beliefs, and be able to work with myself and with my ego, and to be able to push aside my opinion [Laughing] so I can actually hear, for a moment, what the other person is telling me, not what I think they are.

Because I go and visit the different religious groups and, what some people might call, cults, it doesn't make sense to be combative. You really have to learn to listen. I would say that learning to listen is the greatest thing I ever learned from someone of faith.

**Jacobsen:** When I talked to Faisal Saeed Al Mutar, a prominent former Muslim, he noted that in discussions different strategies work for different groups in terms of efficacy.

**If you take someone who is an extremist but does not want to be in it and is questioning it, you can have a conversation. However, if you take someone who fully believes in extremist and terrorist interpretations or versions of a religion, that person will be very unlikely to listen to any argumentation.**

**So, an emotional appeal may be appropriate there. That is where a bridge can be built. Do you think that matches personal experience as well? Although, I do not know if you have been in contact with people on the far end.**

**Klingenberg:** Definitely, not in such an extreme, fortunately, I never had to communicate with someone who had such radical beliefs, but I work with true believers in supernatural phenomena.

You do find out this quite quickly. Even though you have the arguments, logic, and statistics on your side that is not going to work. You have to be able to communicate with that person on the level the person is willing to communicate on.

Sometimes, you need to use emotional arguments and appeals, even as a skeptic it goes against what you hold dear. Sometimes, you have to commit logical fallacies such as appeal to emotion to get the person listening.

When that person starts listening to you and starts taking you seriously as a discussion partner, then you can start to have a discussion.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Claire.



# The National Youth Internet Safety and Cyberbullying Task Force, Inc. (ISTF)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 6, 2018

The National Youth Internet Safety and Cyberbullying Task Force, Inc. (ISTF) is intended for the adolescents and their families to have a resource to know what cyberbullying and internet safety is and what to do in the case of cyberbullying.

As Chris Rock notes, rightfully, real-life bullying tends to be worse than words on a shimmering screen. Nonetheless, the safety of the young is important as there are those within one's own peer group that can be out to explicitly harm an individual young person.

Also, there are those who are well-above the age of teenage peers who want to take advantage, and sometimes do, of the naivete of the young, whether through ignorance and the vulnerability of individuals to the evils of the world or to the proper informational etiquette.

That is to say, the proper data decorum for the young comes from the discriminatory foresight about what sites are and are not safe. Parents and so families need to be aware of this; they need to be able to ascertain what is and is not safe regarding the online world.

As noted on the ISTF website, "It also serves as a catalyst for the prevention of teen suicide, teen dating abuse, human trafficking, and bullying through research, education, support, helplines, and resources. It also works to aid teen victims of sexual abuse and/or family abuse. The task force covers a wide range of teen related issues, but focuses the majority of its time on teen suicide, bullying, internet safety, dating abuse, and cyberbullying."

Kids deserve a safe upbringing. There is an essential need to provide for the young in some critical ways because children have guardians. Those guardians or parents, specifically, are bound to the duty of interests of the child. In particular, the best interests of the child.

This creates a moral arc and interest in the upbringing of the children, especially in terms of the safety for the young. The internet is the same as any place. There are predators preying on the vulnerable, on the young and the old alike.

The problem in the modern world is the relative vulnerability of the young population because of the issues with the rapid changes in the technological and, as a result social landscape. Cindy is up until 3am texting with Tyrone about his breaking up with Brian.

It is heartbreaking and socially juicy gossip. We are addicted to our devices; same with our young the population. The question is what to do in the case of socially inept discourse where there is inadvertent or even overt abuse of another young person.

Then there are the really serious cases of those who wish to bully young people in the online world, or cyberbully, in order to garner information about the young person, presumably to take advantage of them.

In each case, we have the problem of the cyberbullying from peers and adults with different motivations, dissimilar long-term outcomes, but the same title of cyberbullying. The main one

focused on by national and international organizations is the form of the peer to peer cyberbullying. A majority of youths admit to being cyberbullied in their lifetimes.

This becomes a ubiquitous concern for the parents and problem for the teens of the upcoming generations. The ISTF works not only within the United States but also in Canada and the United Kingdom.

There are four offices in New York State, two in Pennsylvania, one in Vermont, and another two in Massachusetts. Overall, we can see the development of organizations such as the ISTF to work on tackling the problem of cyberbullying. The idea is to create a less abusive and kinder world. Who does not want that?

“The task force is recognized as a national task force which is formed typically as a special operation to work to help a certain task or cause,” the ISTF describes, “It’s also recognized as a human service organization, as well as a non-profit organization under the Internal Revenue Service’s 501(c)3 tax exemption code. As a non-profit organization, we rely 100% on donations to keep the task force running.”

The donations enter the finances of the ISTF from a variety of sources including awards, business, community, and grants. More than 90 cents on every dollar work towards their state anti-bullying mandate and mission. It is one of the world’s leading anti-bullying organizations. I write for them and highly recommend them. Our team is completely volunteer and come from across the United States, even Canada such as myself.

Please do donate or volunteer if you can. You can go to the website and reach out for volunteering or donating!

# The 11-Month Low for the Pound

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 7, 2018

The UK Pound has gone down to its 11-month low, recently. This is according to the UK International Trade Secretary Liam Fox, who stated that the pound is falling.

The risk of a no-Brexit deal is, now, 60%. This is a dip of the pound against the dollar: “Sterling is down 0.4% against the dollar to \$1.2963 at 10.30 a.m.

Following this, it went to its lowest point since the prior September. This statement by Fox about the increased, greatly so, probability of no deal for Brexit led to the decrease in the current, of the Pound.

The idea of a no-Brexit deal is a Britain leaving the EU without any deal on the future trading arrangements. It went from 1/2 to 6/10 in probably, a jump of 10%.

As reported, “Fox is a Brexit supporter and was one of three cabinet appointments made by UK Prime Minister Theresa May to appease that faction of the Tory Party.”

Now, he made some comments to the effect that warning of Mark Carney, the governor of the Bank of England, made the odds uncomfortably high. It sent the pound in a nose-dive or spiral downward.

March, 2019, is the deadline for the deal with Brexit in the UK. However, there has been almost no progress in coming to a conclusion on the applicability of the deals.

The nature of the trading partnership between the EU and Britain remains uncertain, and uncomfortably so, too. This

Throughout Europe, the stock and currency markets have been on the down because of bad data from Germany as well, Germany orders to its factories declined by about 4%.

The deteriorating relationship, via trade, between the US and the EU has not helped the situation overall, either.

The article concluded, “Elsewhere, accountant BDO released a survey on Monday saying that the UK service sector has shrunk for the first time since 2010. The sector covers everything from consultancy to waiting tables and accounts for 80% of UK GDP.”

# Not Too Far Off: Speaking of “Brave New World”

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 8, 2018

The Computer Age comes, by implication, with the digitization of many things. One of those was the human genome beginning with the Human Genome Project.

With the information-based view of the world emerging for decades, the perspectives on ancient topics become less abstract-theoretical and more concrete-practical.

The issues around the human genome and its edit enter into a number of camps including leave it alone, edit only out deadly mutations, or enhance the heck out of it.

The basic dilemma with the digitization of the human genome remains the possibility of germline editing. This one raises the most hairs in a cold shiver and sweat.

Let's take, for example, the possibility of ethics eroding and then the human genome being wildly experimented on, as we have done with a variety of other species including many mammals.

The alteration to their germline leads to the direct, rapid engineering and descent with conscious modification by human beings. The idea extended to human beings raises the prospects of the rich-poor divide, the rapid change in the direction and selection pressures of the human species — even the possibility of the creation of a new type of being built from the template of human beings.

Bear in mind, the UK Ethics Council approved the modification of the genomes of children. The future is not nigh; it is here. The questions asked for decades now have answers in the affirmative about the scientific possibility but not for the moral or ethical considerations.

The moral and ethical considerations of these makes for an interesting dilemma with huge concomitant responsibilities placed on human beings because of the power inherent in the choices made collectively in the near future for the long-term future of the species. Nothing too lofty there.

# In Conversation with Maya Bahl on Morphology, Sex, Race and Skin Color

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 27, 2018

*Maya Bahl is an editor and contributor to The Good Men Project with me. She has an interest and background in forensic anthropology. As it turns out, I hear the term race thrown into conversations in both conservative and progressive circles. At the same time, I wanted to know the more scientific definitions used by modern researchers including those in forensic anthropology. Then I asked Bahl about conducting an educational series. Here we are, part two.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Regarding the question of race and its distinctions within the professional circles, what are the distinct characteristics in facial morphology utilized to determine someone's race? How does skull morphology identify someone's race within forensic anthropology? Why does hip morphology only indicate sex and not race?

**Maya Bahl:** Aspects of the face and hips are indicators in telling the difference between men and women posthumously, where forensic anthropologists take measurements in providing an accurate reading.

The nasal arch, forehead, jawline, and what is known as the mastoid process that is behind the jawline are indicators of race, although, it's also the case where individuals of a race could show features that are distinguishable of another race.

Hip Morphology simply indicates sex because of the single anatomical and biological difference between males and females and how it relates to the birthing process, and how in humans the role of giving birth has been assigned to the female.

**Jacobsen:** Can one determine the race by bone structure and, therefore, infer skin color through forensic anthropology?

**Bahl:** Through modern imaging and scanning programs, yes one could run a prediction and generate an image of an individual and therefore infer skin color. Many times image technicians have done so whether it's to help law enforcement identify a perpetrator or victim or to bring closure through identification of a loved one. Even outside of Anthropology, facial and skeletal reconstruction has also aided historians and researchers in seeking the truth, like with reconstructing "Otzi" or the Iceman that was found in the Swiss Alps. Without image processing software though, one couldn't determine race by bone structure.

**Jacobsen:** How does race differ from ethnicity according to the experts who spend their lives in this field?

**Bahl:** Race captures the scientific rigor of genetics and biology whereas ethnicity attempts to group perceived ancestry, ethnicity by definition is more specific as it goes deeper in linking people together. One may have an Asian Ancestry for instance, but have a Khmer Ethnicity from Cambodia.

**Jacobsen:** What are some inferences one can make about race through some practical, low-level, simple examples of skeletal morphology?

**Bahl:** I would also turn the question around and just point out that variation among people are surfacing each day, where the distinct shapes of one's face or nose is now not enough to claim someone's race. There is 1 in every 1,666 births of identifying as a Transgendered individual, according to the 2000 study in the American Journal of Human Biology, where variation would undoubtedly be found.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Maya.

# Leo Igwe on Global Humanism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 28, 2018

Dr. Leo Igwe provided some more, as per usual, needed light on the participation of one of the most populated African nations in non-religious events and programs.

He laments the excess focus on the variety of religious activities including “the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the meetings of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, of the World Council of Churches, of the Anglican, Methodist or Presbyterian and the Vatican establishments.”

He’s right. Why not some more attention to the individuals who do harbour the beliefs behind the actions involved in the pilgrimages and the meetings of the various international religious communities?

In fact, the non-religious, and in particular the humanist, global communities have been hosting events, meetings, and so on, for a long time. One of the most recent has Nigeria present at it.

“The International Humanist and Ethical Union, now known as the Humanists International held its general assembly in Auckland in New Zealand,” Dr. Igwe explained, “New Zealand is one of the most irreligious nations in the world. In fact, almost half of the population identify as nonreligious.”

The Humanists International is a global collective of the formal non-religious communities around the world. It is an important organization and does crucial work in the development of plans of actions and in the visibility of the irreligious global movement.

They were using this time to discuss the important policy issues of the day in addition to the direction desired for the international irreligious, and often humanist, community under the rubric of Humanists International.

Igwe stated, “New Zealand Humanists hosted this year’s General Assembly at the Heritage Hotel in Auckland, and Nigeria was among the few African humanist organizations that attended the meeting. There were other African attendees from Uganda.”

Igwe went on to described important events before the General Assembly, which included one of the functions at the House of Parliament in Wellington. That is, the Hon. Grant Robertson hosted an event in which a representative from Nigeria spoke in order to bring serious attention to the persecution of a formal non-religious minority, the humanists.

He went on to explain how Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia continue hold the real, illegitimate threat of an attack, imprisonment, or killing of a citizen, of one of the respective nations, who does not believe in the religion of birth or of the majority of the country. This violates freedom of belief and freedom of religion as stipulated in the *UN Declaration of Human Rights*.

Humanists and other nonbelievers, or unbelievers — or “infidels” — deserve and reserve the same rights as everyone else to the freedoms codified in international rights documents and are working assiduously to have them realized for them — and others.

Igwe described another event as follows:

*Another event that preceded the General Assembly was an international humanist conference. The event took place in Auckland. The conference featured speakers from the host country, New Zealand, and others from Pakistan, Australia, the UK, Nigeria, and Nepal. The presentations explored a wide variety of themes and situations. For instance, one presentation discussed the challenges that the New Zealand Maori face because there was no word for 'atheist' in the local language. Thus every Maori was assumed to be a believer in gods and should lead in prayer.*

There were educational presentations on the ways in which to defend secularism with arguments and also the means humanism can bring to bear on the violent and extremist religiosity witnessed in nations including Afghanistan and Pakistan. Then he also reported on some other lectures/speeches about the secular educational paradigms and the role of secularization in the world.

There was also a tribute paid to the late Josh Kutchinsky, who died in 2018.

One of the most important aspects, personally opinion, would be the adoption at the Assembly of the Auckland Declaration Against the Politics of Division. There is a terrifying and worrying rise in the politics of authoritarianism, xenophobia and racism and even sexism, and calls for policy or social-political orders at odds with the prevailing international human rights frameworks.

One important progression for the Nigerian non-religious community was the ratification of the Atheist Society of Nigeria.

“The admission of the atheist society into the world humanist body is a positive development for nonreligious in Nigeria. Since the 90s, the humanist/ nonreligious community Nigeria has been growing in terms of number and social visibility,” Igwe said, “Nigeria has been taking an active part in the international humanist event and has featured in the several general assemblies of the Humanists International.”

Now, Nigeria’s Atheist Society of Nigeria, Humanist Assembly of Lagos, and Humanist Association of Nigeria play an important role in the formal non-religious movements into the future.

I look forward to their progress and praise their efforts, hoping they receive the accolades they deserve for the work they’re doing in one of the more difficult areas of the world in which to make this progress.



# Pentagon Develops Its Own AI Hub

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 29, 2018

The Pentagon is working to keep a pace with the international developments in the artificial intelligence or AI community. October, 2016, saw the formation of the Defense Innovation Board with its set of recommendations.

One of the recommendations in the larger set was the centralization of an AI and machine learning applied research unit within the Defense Department of the US Government.

Now, in latter 2018, we see the development of the Pentagon systems for AI research. Indeed, the Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan issued a memorandum.

In it, there was the formal creation of the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center. The purpose is to more rapidly research, develop, and implement a wide variety of AI tools for the Defense Department's purposes.

There are a set of National Mission Initiatives, of which the larger AI projects are a major part. Some deal with the more urgent, grander challenges within the mandate of the Defense Department.

The Joint Artificial Intelligence Center is intended to improve coordination and collaboration for a variety of AI projects with private industry and public educational institution experts and researchers.

Some of the purported considerations are for ethical and humanitarian efforts. There will be the AI defense principles based on statements by the head of machine learning at the Pentagon, Brendan McCord.

The Joint Artificial Intelligence Center is a big step in the work of the Defense Department in its goals of AI research and tools to assist in its work. The work to better integrate AI-assistance in into its operations and work for the United States, as part of general national security.

As noted, with the Cold War over, the US retained almost unprecedented power and has continued to for a long time since the end of it. There is an almost unmatched level of military and technological sophistication of the United States compared to any other country on the surface of the Earth.

Now, the technologies that lay the foundation for the superiority of the US in military capabilities has been challenged, fundamentally. Because the technology has been spread throughout the world and, thus, reducing the exclusivity of the technological superiority the US compared to other nations around the globe. This challenges hegemony of the United States.

The Defense Department utilization of AI technology is an important part of the increased protection of the governmental and citizen interests of the US because the battle networks of the Defense Department can help with the efficiency and power of the US military and its intended operations and missions.

“The 2018 National Defense Strategy foresees that AI will likely change the character of war; thus, in Shanahan's words, the United States ‘must pursue AI applications with boldness and alacrity,’ as reported, “A major challenge to the realization of the Defense Department's AI

ambitions is that the capabilities to develop and deploy cutting-edge AI technologies today sit almost exclusively within the domain of private technology companies.”

# Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 31, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When considering the restrictions on Muslim men and Muslim women in Egypt, what are the similarities and differences?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** Surely, there are some difference, in childhood there are more restrictions on playing of girls, most of the families don't allow the girls to go outside of the home. In the adulthood there are many restrictions on women in their dressing, their manner of speak, and their moves outside home and everything. Cities got little civilization and modernity in the clothes of women by the standard of backward fundamentalism, but beneath the external appearances most of the people have religious fundamental middle-aged minds and values.

Lives of men are no that good also, society does not give them also a real freedom in most of their choices in life, their ways of life, values and morals. It's a country which you cannot easily live in it with a different manner than traditional backward way.

**Jacobsen: Are they better or worse, within the religious system, for men or women regarding restrictions and moral injunctions?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** It's worse for women. Judges still adopt some sharia laws informally, so if a man kills his wife with claiming bad morals like cheating him, he will go with light sentence, on the other hand if a woman makes the same for the same claim, she would be executed. This is from Muhammad laws in hadiths. Also, if a father kills his son meanwhile he was hitting him, in the most cases he would get some years in jail, because Islam says there no punishment on a father kills his son!

The modern Egyptian laws consider the violence of husband against wife a cause for verdict of divorcing her from him. But the written law is one thing, and what happens in reality is another thing. Islam considers it as a right of men to hit their wives, sisters, and daughters. Although of that many modern civilized families would make trouble and real hell to a husband who hit their daughter.

In the principle, they consider woman follower and inferior to men.

If you are a man you can dress shorts in street, if you are a woman you would get harassments, violence (if the situation takes a very religious tendency), or even rape in some areas.

**Jacobsen: How do women play an important role in the liberation of the atheist community in Egypt?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** Atheist community? In Egypt we are individuals here and there, but they don't form a society, that would be a great comfortable thing. Most of atheist or skeptic half or primitive atheist women adopt or pretend the eastern religious values, manners, and ways of dressing. This is the case for 99% of the I think. So, these women need to free themselves first. The economic matter has a role, rarely when I saw a real

liberal secular woman in Egypt. Because many on women here depend on religious traditional men, father, uncle, brother, or husband.

**Jacobsen: You may have seen the news article about the Saudi women's rights activists creating an online radio platform. What can Egyptians do to foster this form of non-violence dissent utilizing the right to freedom of expression?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** Yeah, that becomes a real thing in Saudia, because they faced extremism for long time and the education in Saudia get some improvement.

Here in Egypt I don't see any real feminist movements that cares of the public and can won their attention, may be there are some movements for the elites. But what they need to reach to the people of Egypt, our poor ignorant fundamental real people. There is no value of freedom or good education and culture, no good jobs and salaries for most people, so they adopt the legends and dark ages values and ideas.

**Jacobsen: Are there Egyptian ones in existence now? If so, what are they?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** As I said above, these organizations have very little or no influence on the Egyptian society.

**Jacobsen: The nature of religion builds into the political system in Egypt. What is the relationship between politics and religion in Egypt?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** The government uses religious and national claims to hide its failures in economic. The political leaders care to appear as a religious people who attend prays and religious feasts, and give prizes for people and young person who memorize Quran verses.

**Jacobsen: How does this relationship between politics and religion in Egypt change the political and legal system?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** Sure, it has bad influences. If we have a civil law, there would be freedom of expression against Islam, martial government, the traditions and legends. We would have equal right for men and women, including the inheritance laws. The men wouldn't enslave women by the ideas and values of Islam and Christendom.

**Jacobsen: In turn, how does this impact the laws and political restrictions on the civic and public lives of atheists?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** In Egypt, you wouldn't get executed for being a freethinker of an apostate, but If you declare that or express yourself in public, there is a really good chance to be hit badly by public lay people, or going to jail in the silly accusation of insulting and offending of religions, it's the same accusation of blasphemy of the middle ages. In one case Mrs. Sara Harqan get here embryo killed by violence, when she went with her husband to police station, the policemen arrest the victims!

So, atheists aren't allowed to share in public life, culture, media and teaching.

**Jacobsen: What is the social and legal punishment for blasphemy and apostasy in Egypt, if any?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** Being an openly atheist in the most cases would mean losing your relations with almost all your relatives, because of the religiousness and fundamentalism of this ignorant society.

If you express your beliefs and opinions as an atheist in public, if someone report you, you would 3 to 5 or more years in jail, just for expressing ideas that doesn't kill! And they may inflict forfeit on you to complete destroying your life. They do that to prevent anyone from thinking, talking or writing,

**Jacobsen:** How does this compare to other Middle East nations?

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** As I know this resembles the situation in countries like Morocco, Algeria, Civil Syria, and Tunisia, and less violent than the execution sentence in Saudia and Jordon.

**Jacobsen:** Also, how can the international non-religious community work together to foster the translation of freethinker books through financing organizations or individuals, or contributing personal translation expertise?

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** They can adopt secretly the real translators and thinkers, after making sure that they are making great important big efforts. They must have committee or committees to avoid the crook deceitful frauds, and monitor on weekly and monthly basics the products of the translators to stop finance any unserious ones. The translator must have previous important works with good translation valuing to his motherland language.

**Jacobsen:** In terms of the Egyptian atheist community, how does one's family tend to treat them?

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** They tend to threat or hit them, and if you have the strong character of body or the strong will enough, they will just consider you a non-existent person, and their relations with you, this has its ups and downs actually. In a country like this you need all your relations with relatives to get decent job, or you need to go to marry in this traditional country, for example

**Jacobsen:** How does the public treat them?

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** The public think atheist infidel heathens is a good piety for Allah, no problem in doing it, but the civil laws would prevent them, so at least when they get a chance they would think at least destroy and steal their property, hitting them badly, or harass or rape liberal women, etc. this is surly the manner of the rubble lay people. The more civilized educated of them would just treat you as a Zionist in a mosque who tried to gather money for Israel from Moslem prayers (Just kidding), I mean they would deal with you in tough cold manner.

**Jacobsen:** How does the media marginalize and defame them?

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** Egyptian Atheists appear rarely in Egyptian and Arabian media, in most cases the rubble interviewer dealt badly with them, one of them "Shaima'a sae'd expel an atheist lady, so I don't understand why she had invited her from first, this is not the good Arabian manners of hospitality. Others mad good shows and try to be more neutral and in the same spirit to appear in the side of Islamic clergy, in view of their

fearing for their jobs, publicity, and lives. Some of those more decent interviewers might be skeptics, atheists, or secular moderate Muslims.

**Jacobsen: How do the government and legal system deal with the atheist and freethinker population in Egypt?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** They fight to prevent them from writing, publishing, or talking in public and media. Many went to jail. If the education and economic systems still its ways in Egypt, with the politics and horrible idiot media (most of it), there is no hope for advancement and liberalism for this country. So, the no real threat form freethought to ignorance and terrorism middle-aged thoughts in such conditions. Imagine you try to make middle-aged people in Europe to be the nowadays European people! It doesn't work, they need good economics, good ruling systems, good improved education, culture...etc.

**Jacobsen: What can other non-religious groups, including humanists — though most humanists are atheists, do to help support and bolster the efforts of the atheist and freethinker community in Egypt, or of its diaspora?**

**Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator:** They should care first for the real original thinkers who hold secular liberal (western) values, and for the atheists of lay public average persons. I think they must contain them carefully, and try to influence them with the more enlightened real liberal values, because some of them may still with many fundamental ignorant middle-aged values or religions to deal with women and other nationalities for example.

They would find many ignorant silly fraud persons who search for living or money, so they must have committees to choose the persons who want and can make good scientific, atheist or criticism videos, write, translate, or paint in some cases. They should focus in thinkers who make criticism of Islam, or write or translate books on secularism, atheism, evolution science and cosmology.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time.**

# Waleed Al-Husseini on Women and Islam

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 31, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** For women who leave the religious fundamentalism seen in the some of the world, what is the consequence to the family, especially if the culture is based on honor?

**Waleed Al-Husseini:** Women, they have the most complicated situation if they stay Muslims; imagine what the situation is if they left Islam, some of them if they just stop wearing hijab the family will stop talking with her, and the others will start to call her whore!

That is why some ex-Muslims women still wear hijab, even here in France.

If you talk about the closed society, yes, many got killed in the name of honor, because they just did something not consonant with Islamic values!

**Jacobsen:** Can a woman lose the financial and family support system if they renounce the faith?

**Al-Husseini:** That's what happened for some of the women who leave in a modern society like Europe. The family just stop talking to her and cut all the relations with her. You know, some of them had this result just because she had a non-Muslims boyfriend. She went to live with him! Not just about faith!

This situation of women was one of the main reasons for me to leave Islam, because I refuse to treat my mother and sister or my girlfriend with Islamic values, which look to women like today's citizens in the society.

**Jacobsen:** Many ex-religious people continue to fear hell while not believing in it. It becomes a form of long-term, even lifelong, trauma for them. Are there any unique forms of trauma experienced by women who leave the faith?

**Al-Husseini:** The same one but what is most insulting is the treatment of her like a whore.

**Jacobsen:** What have been some hopeful stories of recovery from fundamentalist religion that you have seen in France among the ex-Muslim population?

**Al-Husseini:** Yes, we had a hard story for a girl. She was with her family and forced to wear hijab since 10-years-old, during her school time, and in that time she was thankful for French law, which made forbidden the hijab in school; and after when she started working, she was happy for the work of the law that forbade the hijab, but after all this she started her life alone after her family wanted to let her marry an the age of 17 for some man. This was the main reason for her to leave the family and be far away from them. Now, she has a good life and is happy! She left her family since 15!

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Waleed.

# On Religion in Iran Before and After the Revolution

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 2, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Your book *Limu Shirin, The Bitter Story of Life After the Iranian Revolution* speaks to personal experience of post-Islamic Revolution of Iran. Religion comes in multiple flavors. What was the flavor — so to speak — of religion since the Revolution in personal life in Iran?

**Arya Parsipur:** Before the revolution Iran was blessed with a society that accommodated followers of many religions (including Judaism) who lived in comfort and harmony; but post-revolution regime of Iran would not tolerate freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the civil rights of non-Muslims. During the early stages of the revolution back in the 80's Iran was at the peak of radicalism and many non-Muslims and non-believers who had lost their jobs and property fled the country. Even the lives of Muslims who stayed back were at risk if they proved to be against the regime and the revolution's values. Frequently houses were inspected by the regime's guards in search of western films and music (considered un-Islamic at the time) or any other objects that verified people's beliefs i.e. holy books of other religions, images of the late Shah, alcoholic drinks, etc. and Imprisonment and execution would have been the outcome if such objects were found. You could say that was a very similar situation of "Inquisition" in the olden times. Speaking of flavour, I would say Iranians have experienced a very unpleasant and bitter flavour of religion since the Revolution.

**Jacobsen:** How does religion graft itself onto Iranian society and influence politics?

**Parsipur:** Before the Revolution, although the majority of Iranians were Muslims, had religious beliefs and attended mosques, religion had no influence in the politics. The Shah was a secular Muslim, had modern views and the country was run by people according to their merit rather than religious views. The society also was very open-minded when it came to hijab and dressing codes. (Refer to the first chapter of my book, "Two Sides of the Same Soil" for a more thorough outlook)

The post revolution regime, however, has created much sensitivity about religion; and politicians are handpicked based on their commitment to Islam, hijab, and other Islamic values, who then through their power inject and execute such values into the society. Moreover, having the national media under full control, Islamic views have been force-fed to the society on a daily basis over the last 39 years. Despite such efforts the majority of Iranians do not practice Islam. Some don't believe in it; others hold open views about it. They consume alcohol stealthily and have recently started to remove their hijab on the streets, both coming with harsh consequences if caught.

**Jacobsen:** What other national examples reflect this form of grafting religion onto the political and civic life of a country?

**Parsipur:** There is a big gap between the regime and the people and the Iranian society is largely polarized. The theocratic regime is established on people's tendency to religion so the main reason to insist and invest on Islamic conduct is to stay in power rather than Islam itself. So one way of showing disapproval towards the regime is to deviate from religion and disobey the Sharia law. A recent prominent movement has begun by young women who attach their



headscarf to a stick while standing on a power box and holding it out in public. The first girl that started this was on “Enghelab” street (meaning Revolution) and that’s how the movement got its name “The Girls of Revolution Street”. After that the movement spread quickly across the country. This has been the only systematic united movement women have done to fight against the compulsory hijab since 1985 when the law was passed in the parliament.

These days girls have the courage to remove their headscarves and simply walk or dance on the street and film themselves to share on social media. Most of the time they get harassed and even beaten by “Islamic ethic police” or fanatic individuals but the movement has not stopped.

**Jacobsen: What seems like the weaker points of the theocrats in Iranian society? How does this provide a basis for activism on the ground, from the people, in the latter 2010s and early 2020s?**

**Parsipur:** At the early stages of the regime Khomeini and his circle were genuinely concerned about establishing an Islamic state, and wished to expand Shiism through their power. However, as the years went by, the world initiated oil trades with Iran and the Ayatollahs got wealthy, so they showed more interest in financial activities and owning monopolies for import and export of goods and only using Islam as an excuse to stay in positions within the regime that gave them access to Iran’s oil money. Gradually traces of the IRGC force (known as SEPAH a military assembly initially created to protect the regime) was found in industrial sectors of Iran and today they are a multibillion-dollar business owning almost all economic sectors of the country. With this has come corruption, fraud and disloyalty among these men in power which is weakening the regime from inside. We often hear testimonies or threats that they make against one another and I believe this hollow monster will soon collapse from within. However, people’s protests on the streets could accelerate this downfall.

**Jacobsen: How can international humanist and non-religious organizations provide some help in the reduction of theocratic tendencies in the world through support of the ordinary citizens who value the Enlightenment principles, the United Nations values, of freedom in various forms and the protection of personal autonomy?**

**Parsipur:** Countries like Iran that are run by Islamic sharia law are most certainly violating rights of women, non-Muslims, atheists and homosexuals. The humanist organizations should be more focused on the life quality of the residents and harsher scrutiny and pressure should be on the leaders of such countries. These organizations could also educate the residents about their human rights and the necessity of secularism for a better life for everyone. The larger human rights organizations such as the UN should stop their hypocrisy and refuse to accept such countries as members.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Arya.**

# Humanists International Chief Executive Urges the End of ‘Blasphemy’ Law in Ireland

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 6, 2018

A colleague, and a smart and good man, Gary McLelland — Chief Executive of Humanists International previously known as International Humanist and Ethical Union, spoke on Ireland at a conference.

The conference was covering the issues of censorship and humanism. In particular, the major, and increasingly mainstream, issue of blasphemy, which, in a sense, amounts to a religious privilege over the non-religious and questioning religious people.

The conference, the All-Ireland Summer School, is coordinated and organized by the Humanist Association of Ireland and the Irish Freethinkers and Humanists with the titled, for this year, being “Humanism, Freethought and Censorship.”

McLelland stated that there are a number of laws against blasphemy, so-called ‘blasphemy’ laws, in Europe, which can “set a terrible precedent” for the international scene because this can provide a basis for the punishment of people who criticize religions or faith tenets.

Many countries still exist in which blasphemy is still punishable by death or with imprisonment, even for bloggers such as the famous Waleed Al-Husseini — who now lives in France and founded the Council of Ex-Muslims of France.

The Republic of Ireland has a referendum on October 26 2018 for a vote on the blasphemy law in Ireland regarding Article 40 with a clause, which states:

*The publication or utterance of blasphemous, seditious, or indecent matter is an offence which shall be punishable in accordance with law.*

The Humanists International, previously IHEU, made an urgent call to the voters to take an assertive stand for the values of freedom of expression, humanism, and secularism to make sure that blasphemy laws, such as this one in Article 40, be completely scrapped.

# On Football and Pride with Melvin Lars

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 3, 2018

*Mr. Melvin Lars is a native of Bossier City/Shreveport, Louisiana; he received several undergraduate and graduate academic degrees from various universities; La. Tech. (BS) Univ. & Centenary (Admin. Cert.) College) in Louisiana, Texas (Tx. Southern (MA) Univ), Michigan (Eastern, Mi Univ, & Saginaw Valley St. Univ.) and has done extensive educational studies in Ohio (Youngstown (Supt., cert.) St Univ) and California (Los Angeles, (CA. cert) City College).*

*Lars is a certified Violence Prevention/Intervention Specialist, receiving his certification and training through the prestigious Harvard University, with Dr. Renee Prothro-Stith.*

*He is a licensed/ordained Elder/Minister in both the C.O.G.I.C. & C.M.E. Churches. He is the CEO/founder of Brighter Futures Inc; a Family Wellness, Violence Prevention/Intervention and Academic Enhancement and entertainment Company; an affiliate representative for the NFL ALLPRODADS Initiative. Former interim; Executive Director of Urban League of Greater Muskegon, Former NAACP President of Muskegon County; 2007–2012, employed as a consultant to the Michigan Department of Education as a Compliance Monitor for the (NCLB Highly Qualified) initiative for Highly Qualified Teachers and works collaboratively with Hall of Famer Jim Brown and his Amer-I-Can Program and is a ten-time published author of various books, and self-help and academic articles. He is married to Ann Lars and is the father of one adult son, Ernest. Here we talk about sports and pride in an uncensored and educational series.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** You spent a long time in, and were very successful at, football.

**Melvin Lars:** Yes.

**Jacobsen:** So, you have a lot of experience in American football. The bravado and ego — and some good aspects to it, of course — in college and higher-level football stand out to me.

**What advice can you give to younger men to keep their ego in check?**

**Lars:** [Laughing] Scott, when we speak, I am always laughing. I am dealing with life, the real world. To answer that question, specifically, you have to start off with something. When you are involved in sports, certainly at a high level, it is always about being the alpha male. No one talks about it.

No one says, “You have to be the alpha male.” Nonetheless, there is a perception. In trying to be the one trying to attain the lofty status of the alpha male, unfortunately, people forget. You cannot talk about the game; you have to play the game.

Certain individuals are born with more speed or strength. They are able to build themselves better than the others on top of their natural gifts and talents, and blessings. Many times, you get beside yourself. What is getting “beside yourself”? You get full of yourself.

Because when you are competing, you realize, “I am faster. I am stronger. I possess a level of superiority when it comes to participating in a specific area of athletics and having some dominance.”

One has to be careful. One should not get full of oneself. I have been guilty, Scott. I will not be a hypocrite. I have been full of myself, in trying to be the alpha male. Shakespeare said, "To thine own self be true."

He meant that we have to get in touch with ourselves and realize what we're doing. In the final analysis, it is a game. Far too often, we take the game too seriously.

**Jacobsen: If we take boxing, one of the fastest punchers and quickest talkers was Muhammad Ali.**

**Lars:** [Laughing]

**Jacobsen: He was braggadocious.**

**Lars:** Yes.

**Jacobsen: When is it appropriate to have pride? I heard Muhammad Ali was different. In that, he made you feel good as he was saying these things about you. So, it wasn't a putdown necessarily inasmuch as it was part of the theatrics.**

**Lars:** You know what, Scott, it has been my experience too. I am a huge Muhammad Ali fan. In high school, I was also a Golden Gloves boxing champion. I had the opportunity to go to the Olympic trials, for the 1972 trials.

However, when you come to Muhammad Ali, it gets back to the first question. Some guys are more braggadocious or over-the-top. You are conditioned, as an athlete, to be the alpha male. When you begin to realize, you have attained the status.

There is a sense of pride. Other people also begin to receive your abilities as being the alpha male as well. With a person, in my experience, of someone like a Muhammad Ali, who was colourful and charismatic, it comes from the personality. He worked extremely hard.

When we talk about athletics, we have to understand. There is so much work to becoming the quintessential top-of-the-line athlete. A lot of people do not understand that part of it. They believe: you're born with this ability to dominate.

That is why it is important to be careful about being full of ourselves. When you put the work and time into it, there is a sense of pride and accomplishment. You get respect from individuals who would like to be in the same position.

However, for whatever reason, they have not been able to attain it. Ali was an entertainer. But when it came to perfecting his craft, he was blessed to be able to perfect it.

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Lars.**

# Ask Charlotte 1 — Become The Voice CIC & Palestine

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 7, 2018

*Charlotte Littlewood is the Founding Director of Become The Voice CIC. A grass roots youth centered community interest company that she has built in response to the need to tackle hate, extremism and radicalization within communities and online.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Become The Voice (BTV) is an activist organization. In getting at the nuance of the inspiration for the title of the organization, its purpose and content, its values and mission, and so on, apart from the website, please elaborate on these.

**Charlotte Littlewood:** So, Become The Voice was created in January of this year. What I had noticed working in counter-extremism and in Prevent (which is the soft end of counter-terrorism) in the UK, is a distinct lack of coordinated work on the central ground, we have seen politics divide with an increasingly illiberal far-left alongside a far-right. Identity politics have taken front stage. We have seen radicalization taking place Left and Right, but definitely not in the Center.

BTV is about equipping, enabling, and empowering youth to speak out on progressive, central values — speaking out against hate. Through this, it provides resilience in the participants against extremist narratives and to be able to reach out to people with progressive and positive messages. There is an emphasis on outreach. Once they have been upskilled in understanding the issues of extremism, and we bring them together on positive messages that counter hate, we equip them to take that to social media enabling grassroots outreach.

So one problem was a lack of grassroots work. Another problem was any attempt to create youth work was coming from a top-down government effort rather than the young doing this from their own media platforms, their own ways of engaging with each other. That is a second unique thing about BTV, it is truly youth lead.

**Jacobsen:** BTV is collaborating with activists on the ground and helping Palestinians. How so? Why this group of individuals? How are we reaching out via modern media to get the message out there?

**Littlewood:** What we did in Palestine was a gender equality women's program, through this we were, naturally, opposing extremism in itself. It is important to give an understanding of Hebron, Palestine first. I took this quote from Rateeba, who runs the largest youth forum in Palestine. She spoke to me about extremism in Hebron and the history extremism in the women's movement.

She said, "A women's movement began to develop in the late 17th century. It was particularly prominent in 1965. Women were working side by side with men to achieve equality in the political and economic sphere. After the first Intifada in 1987, political Islam started to influence the culture of the Palestinian people. They moved our society far away from the leftist leading parties. They use and continue to use religion to influence people, coming into conflict with our leftist political parties. The Islamist groups started recording successes in the peace process as successes for themselves, which increased their popularity. The Left has essentially disappeared. There is little to no voice for the Left or the middle ground. We are, unfortunately, so affected by the states around us, e.g., the rise of Islamism in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and now Turkey.

There is no escaping. Women used to get together dancing and go out. Now, this is forbidden. They changed the attitude of the people, even the understanding of Islam has changed. We used to live together with different interpretations of Islam and different religions with no conflict based on religion. We used to identify with our nation, language, and culture. Now, political Islam tries to dominate our identity.”

I think this really demonstrates the shift in Palestine towards extremism and a push against progressivism. So, working in gender equality was interesting, because it is gender equality that organizations like Hizb ut-Tahrir have really been working to prevent; it has, in the last year, prevented a shelter for battered women being created. In the last couple of months, they prevented a marathon from taking place that was running through Hebron because it was a mixed gender marathon: men and women were running together.

So as you can see there is an organised effort to push against gender equality and equality for women. This gave us reason to work in gender equality. We aim first to identify the issues facing people in an area and gender equality definitely was a prominent issue. We then work with organizations who are working in that area on the ground, so we can get some professionals involved to do some training with the young people — so they get hands-on workshops with people working on this day-in-and-day-out.

We had a number of women’s rights organizations work with the women, so they really understand the issues and how to speak about them, and understand the work being done and how they can move the issues forward for these organizations while working with them. The final thing we do is upskill them on how to use social media.

One of my directors of BTV is a digital expert. So, she understands how we present stuff on Twitter, how we should blog, the tone of voice, how we should hashtag, and when we should release stuff on social media. All this stuff, I do not know very well. She helps me with this stuff. We deliver this training to the young people. They, essentially, follow a step-by-step guide on how to post, to make sure their posts have the most effect.

You can go onto the BTV Facebook and Instagram and then see what the girls did use in social media. I am trying to find my report, which tells me exactly how many likes and shares and comments they got on their posts. But I can send those details later, so you can see the effect the young people had after using the can-do guide and the messaging put into it.

That is what we practically did as well. We use social media. We did some short videos. We used the BTV Facebook and Instagram platforms for them. They also used their own social media platforms. They had decent followings too. They were trained in how to be as effective online. It means they release the image at the right time of the day, when the most people will see it. There is a way to push a hashtag through a search, which will show the hashtags that are most popular to make sure that you get onto the right trend. There are tricks like that.

We saw them being liked and shared and commented on, at high levels. It is good. Now, we have over 300 people following the BTV Facebook page. A lot of that is Palestinian people from Hebron.

**Jacobsen: For the work of BTV, how do modern media and communications technologies provide a platform for women, e.g., Palestinian women, who have a platform, especially when women tend to have fewer financial resources in most of the world to fund media campaigns for themselves?**

**Littlewood:** So, BTV trained young women in how to use social media effectively. It gives them organizations, including ourselves and other organizations within my network, to tweet at and include in their posts. So, we can reach a wider audience. What is really, really useful about social media, it is completely free. There are no economic restrictions on this. Even some of the cheap phones, smartphones, they have the ability to take a photo and put things on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

It is easy; it is accessible. As we have seen, social media is having a huge influence on how we see the world, our laws, our politics. I think the most obvious example of that is #MeToo. I was looking at this before. 4.7 million people engaged through 12 million posts in the first 24 hours after the #MeToo campaign was first released.

It started with an activist standing up for a young woman who had been sexually abused. Then an actress used the hashtag, her name escapes me, she was the first to use it in the public sphere. That was in 2017. Within 24 hours, 12 million posts using #MeToo. It shows the impact and the reach we can have. Obviously, it influenced discourse, particularly if it was discourse in the UK. It has given the feminist movement a big kick up the ass once again.

Social media is a really important platform for women. It is free, easy, and accessible. If you create something that has impact, and people can relate to it, you can really get your message across.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Charlotte.

# On Research Into Excessive Devotion Toward a Particular Figure or Object

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 8, 2018

*Scott is the Founder of Skeptic Meditations. He speaks from experience in entering and leaving an ashram. Here we talk about excessive devotion to a figure or object.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Who are some leading researchers into cults, of which you're aware?**

**Scott from SkepticMeditations.com:** First, let's define what we mean by "cults". Often the term cults is a pejorative, a negative term, for any group, especially religious, that we or others don't like. The tendency is to label a group or ideology as the "other" and not try then to understand the underlying behaviors and attitudes.

After I've dived deeper into the research cult-like groups and their leaders I've discovered that "cult" behavior and attitudes are everywhere. I'm talking now about psychological phenomenon and not only about some fanatical religious group living on the fringes of society in an ashram, monastery, or flying planes into skyscrapers. Our definition of "cults" to be useful beyond name calling or pigeon-holing must be based on the underlying psychological traits and the degree of control and influence exercised on followers by particular leaders, groups, and ideologies.

In my research I've found many leading thinkers in the field to have written some excellent books, including:

Think: Why You Should Question Everything (2013) Guy P. Harrison. On my blog I reviewed and wrote a brief essay inspired by the book entitled 21 Great Reasons To Think and Be A Skeptic.

Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Magical Thinking (1989) Leonard Zusne and Warren Jones. A seminal book, well-researched, citing studies, which goes in depth into "magical thinking" about psychic and supernatural phenomenon that often accompanies religious cult-like motivations, behaviors, and attitudes.

Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'brainwashing' in China (1989) Robert Lifton. A seminal work that focuses on the behaviors and attitudes of thought-controllers and the thought-controlled. Lifton uses his primary research in Communist China to outline the underlying characteristics of thought-reform/controlling groups. The principles apply in many situations where undue influence and a totalist leader or ideology exercises psychological controls over its victims or followers.

The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion (2013) Jonathan Haidt. Research that sheds light on the divergent attitudes and behaviors of conservative and liberal "cults", politics, and ideologies.

The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power (1993) Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad. A collection of essays which unmasks the covert tactics of authoritarian leaders and their followers. The essays cover a broad range of "cult-like" power plays including how



authoritarian influence is steeped in recovery/12-step programs, Eastern and Western religions, intimate and family relationships.

**Jacobsen: What are some of the good websites for information on cults, e.g., checklists, warnings, leaders, known groups, emerging groups, and helplines for those who want to get out?**

**Scott:** Some online resources I've found helpful in researching and exploring the psychology of thought-control and authoritarian influence, include:

OpenMindsFoundation.org — Organization actively engaged in educating the public about the influence of thought-controlling leaders, groups, and ideologies.

CultEducation.com — Good starting place for research on specific cultic groups. Forums and articles on specific groups that are allegedly harmful to followers and/or society.

ICSAhome.com — International Cultic Studies Association. A variety of speakers and topics on cults and thought-control throughout culture and society.

**Jacobsen: How does a cult differ from a religion?**

**Scott:** Frank Zappa supposedly said that the main difference between a cult and religion is the amount of real-estate the group held. Mainstream groups, like the Catholic Church, are seldom considered a cult. Yet, we find many destructive behaviors and attitudes within the group's ideology and followers. The recent alleged sexual predations of Catholic Clergy is one example of abuses perpetrated by authoritarian leaders among followers. Yet, most Americans, I don't think, see the Catholic Church as a "cult" in the pejorative sense. Our society has accepted the Catholic Church as a norm and many of us know Catholics. I used to be Catholic. Luckily I never became an altar boy or I may have been one of the child victims who lost his virginity to priestly divinity.

The difference between a cult and a religion is in degree, not in kind. Politics, economics, social and medical issues also can have irrational, fanatical, cult-like leaders and followers. Religion is only one area for cult-like expression and destruction.

**Jacobsen: What's the main psychological mechanism behind people wanting to be in a cult?**

**Scott:** It's so human to want to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. To be special, to feel like we are chosen. We all want to feel like we are saving the world. Even if by withdrawing from it, by retreating to save ourselves as a reason to save the world, humanity, or planet.

The desire for certainty, for security in a dangerous and scary world drives most of us to seek certain answers and secrets. The desire to survive, to live after death, to be immortal, is also a big motivator and Con-Men know how to prey on our fears and insecurities. Religious, political and social cults abound. We think our particular ideology or worldview is the best. If only everyone believed and behaved like me or my hero or heroine. Then we'd all be living happily ever after. We live in a mythic world where we try to escape the realities and horrors of destruction, death, and meaninglessness.

When we see that we humans are fallible and responsible, that no divine power or god is going to save us, then we might be able to escape our psychological bondage. For a time, at least. We somehow need to find a way to respect tradition and authority while being able to question and

create new models for authority or testing reality. Then I believe we may psychologically and socially transform our existence.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Scott.

**Scott:** My pleasure.

# Introduction: What Is Shift The Script?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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“No problem can be solved with the same level of consciousness that created it.” — Albert Einstein.

Work to increase the voices of the voiceless is always appreciated, especially work based on intellectual integrity and intellectual humility, to connect all of us. Individuals without much influence or power within their communities rely on the expression of beliefs and opinions by other people. An important effort to improve this world requires raising awareness for the ex-Muslim population.

Ex-Muslims are individuals overlooked for more than one thousand years, ignored by the mainstream conversation. These individuals in a diverse group have not only been pushed away from the centre of conversations on faith and non-faith, but also have their fundamental human rights ignored and violated, due to constant threats of violence and murder.

One organization pioneering the way for people to connect intends to create international evolutionary conversations online, and known as Shift The Script. The purpose of the organization is overcoming misunderstandings, prejudice and ignorance through a unique definition and exercise of what constitutes evolutionary conversations.

As with all change, it is founded on thoughts and words in a certain approach, to facilitate the refinement and exchange of thoughts and words via dialogue, discourse, and discussion. All this is necessary to create necessary re-evaluations of accepted paradigms, and truly create effectively honest conversations.

Why should we accept the premises of the culture handed to us? How can we remove ourselves from the mistakes and prejudices of discourses of the past? What is the basis for a true found effective dialogue? Shift The Script works on these questions, and starts by focusing on Ex-Muslims.

It is vital to start with the voiceless or the semi-unheard. The ex-Muslim population is a beleaguered population. These individuals chose to leave Islam, and many are instantly hit with deprivation of what constitutes fairness and respect for civil rights, punished for freedom of conscience while forced to experience fears of physical violence and multiple threats of murder: truly, the lowest form of conversation and the ‘last refuge of the incompetent.’

It is easy to posit this as an evolutionary shift in the conversation. But this could also be seen as affecting a fundamental change of consciousness. Think of the dialogue pertaining to sexual interactions now, or the right to vote or work for prior generations. All this contributes to an overall consciousness-raising effort around the world in line with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* stipulating the right to freedom of belief, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion (including lack thereof).

These are important rights. They have existed for decades; and entirely new generations who understand these rights will protect and perpetuate an improved new era of ethics set by a prior generation. Shift The Script comprises an international effort to permit collaboration and problem-solving of the most fundamental form — to live free in a conceptual ecosystem

respecting progressive societies for the sake of future generations, while protecting the individual's journey to seek and embrace differences.

The servers, located in Iceland, provide a means by which ex-Muslims and Muslims can enjoy protection in anonymous freedom of speech, when writing or exchanging letters of support, or expressing feelings to heal pain and trauma and build bridges. Muslims and ex-Muslims can talk with one another in a friendly format, through a civil platform linked at [shiftthescript.org](http://shiftthescript.org).

The ability to humanize others requires seeing them as worthy of and capable of conversation. This is part of the "evolutionary shift" or the consciousness-raising efforts of the founders and activists of Shift The Script. The best part might be the grassroots nature inviting all of you to participate and shift scripts, to Shift The Script, not top-down.

Marginalised ex-Muslims may finally experience what too many have been deprived of, in an evolutionary conversation connecting Muslims, Ex-Muslims and non-Muslims. This evolutionary conversation is divided into two stages, and all stages are important.

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