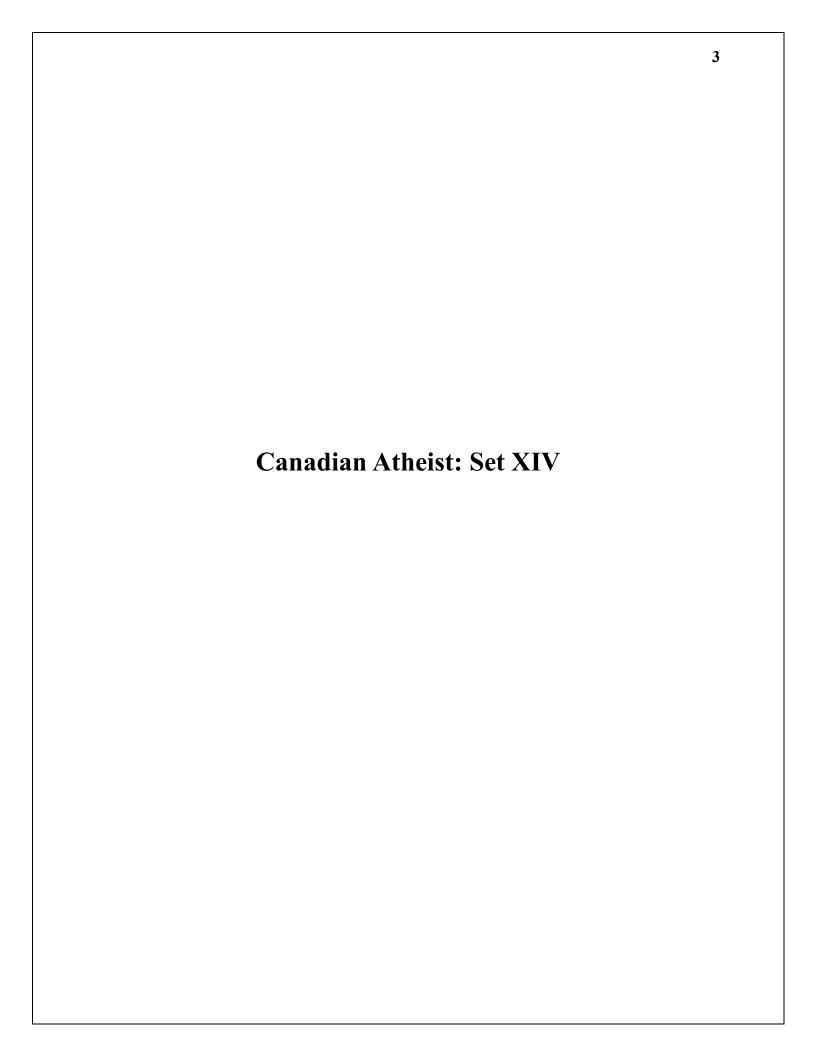


SCOTT DOUGLAS JACOBSEN

In-Sight Publishing



IN-SIGHT PUBLISHING

Publisher since 2014 Published and distributed by In-Sight Publishing Fort Langley, British Columbia, Canada www.in-sightjournal.com

Copyright © 2020 by Scott Douglas Jacobsen

In-Sight Publishing established in 2014 as a not-for-profit alternative to the large commercial publishing houses who dominate the publishing industry. In-Sight Publishing operates in independent and public interests rather than in dependent and private ones, and remains committed to publishing innovative projects for free or low-cost while electronic and easily accessible for public domain consumption within communal, cultural, educational, moral, personal, scientific, and social values, sometimes or even often, deemed insufficient drivers based on understandable profit objectives. Thank you for the download of this ebook, your consumption, effort, interest, and time support independent and public publishing purposed for the encouragement and support of academic inquiry, creativity, diverse voices, freedom of expression, independent thought, intellectual freedom, and novel ideas.

© 2014-2020 by Scott Douglas Jacobsen. All rights reserved. Original appearance in Canadian Atheist. Not a member or members of In-Sight Publishing, 2020 This first edition published in 2020

No parts of this collection may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized, in any form, or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented or created, which includes photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher or the individual co-author(s) or place of publication of individual articles.

> Independent Cataloguing-in-Publication Data No official catalogue record for this book, as an independent endeavour.

Names: Jacobsen, Scott Douglas, author Title: Canadian Atheist: Set XIV / Scott Douglas Jacobsen Description: British Columbia: In-Sight Publishing, 2020. Identifiers: None (epub).

Subjects: | BISAC: PHILOSOPHY / General (PHI000000) Classification: LCC (None) | DDC (None) p. cm.

Not printed but available on the internet at www.in-sightjournal.com 13579108642

Designed and implemented by Scott Douglas Jacobsen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		ledgementsledgements	
1		DIAN ATHEIST	
•	a	Interview with Abderrahmane M'hiri – Ex-Muslim	
	b	Interview with Professor Alex Rosenberg – R. Taylor Cole Professor of Philosophy, Duke University	ty
	c	Interview with Nicole Infinity – Camp Coordinator, Camp Quest North	
	d	Interview with Richard S. Russell – Co-Founder, Atheists and Agnostics of Wisconsin	
	e	Ask Mubarak 2 – This is Nigeria: Freedom of Expression for the Secular	19
	f	Interview with Harris Sultan – Author & Founder, "Ex Muslim Atheist"	21
	g	Ask Kwabena 1 – Chale: Welcome to the Humanist Community of Ghana!	
	h	Interview with Miriam de Bontridder – Board Member, Foundation The Einder	
	i	Ask an Abortion Doula 1 – Abortion Doula: A Canadian Option	
	j	Interview with Kelly – Brights Community Clusters (BCCs) Coordinator, The Brights' Net	
	k	Ask Joyce 2 – Individual Consent and National Consensus	
	1	Interview with Nik J. Gray – Co-Founder, Society of ExMuslims Australia	
	m	Ask Annie Laurie 1 – Secular Women.	
	n	Ask SASS (Rick) 1 – Secular Marriages in South Africa with a Touch of Sass	
	0	Interview with Courtney of "The Free Speech Podcast"	
	р	Interview with John Seager – President, Population Connection	
	q	Interview with Administrator of "Gay Ex Muslim"	
	r	Ask Professor Rosenthal 1 – On Chance, Luck, and Statistics: "I Had No Need of That Hypothesis"	
	S	Interview with Administrator of "Ex-Muslim Memes"	
	t	Interview with Azis – Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Atheist"	
	u	Interview with George Martin – Spokesperson, Anonymous for the Voiceless	
	v	Interview with Shannon Hardy – Founder, Abortion Support Services Atlantic (Halifax, N.S.)	
	W	Interview with Administrator of "Ex-Muslims of India"	
	X	Ask Rob 1 – Non-Holy Writ, or Secular Lit: Lighting the Fire of Freethought	
	у	Interview with Emma Duke – Board Director of Communications, Abortion Support Services Atlan	ntic
	z	Ask Annie Laurie 2 – Secular Women's Leadership and 21st-Century Men	
	aa	Interview with Richael – Media/Social Media Working Group, Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC)	77
	bb	Ask Kwabena 2 – Organizational Duties, Public Flak, and Outreach	81
	cc	Interview with Lois Backus – Executive Director, Medical Students for Choice	83
	dd	Ask Takudzwa 2 – Zimbabwe and Its Discontents, and Supposed Secular Malcontents	85
	ee	Interview with Doris Lin – Administrator, "About Animal Rights"	86
	ff	Interview with Dr. Norman Finkelstein on Gaza Now	89

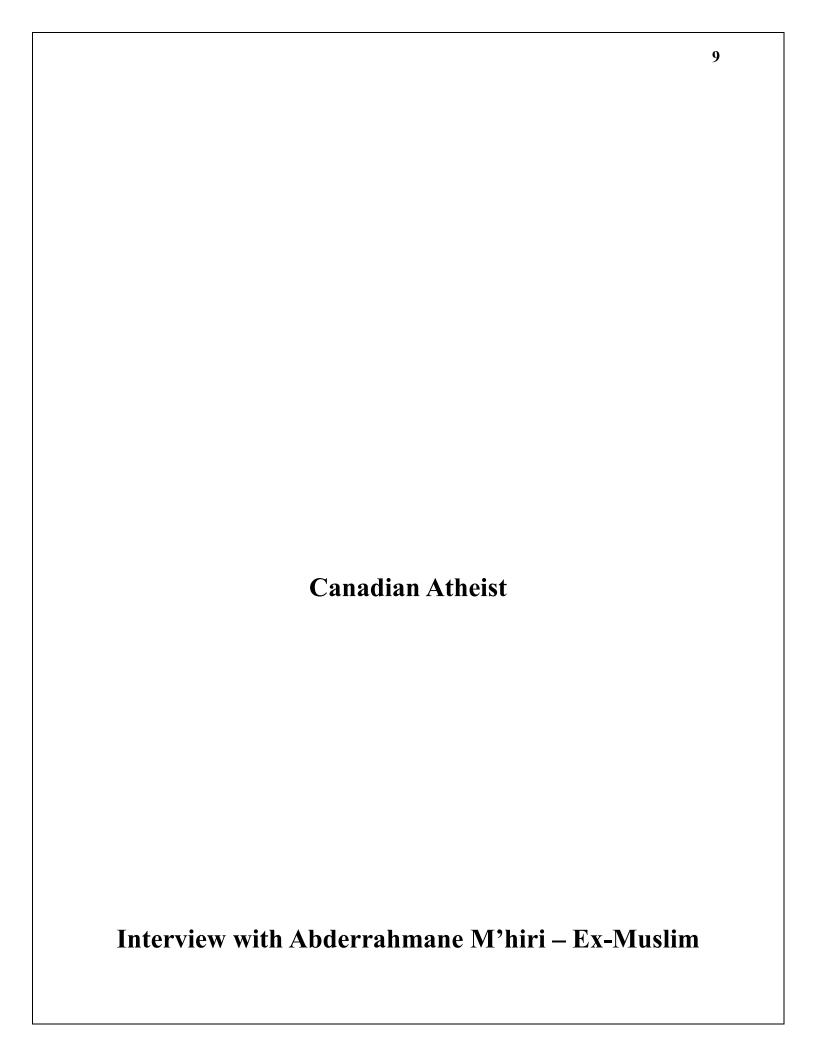
gg Ask Professor Rosenthal 2 – By the Numbers, Boys and Girls: Happenstance and Chance of the	
Everyday	9
hh Interview with James – Toronto Pig Save and The Save Movement	9
License and Copyright	10

Acknowledgements

I express gratitude to Mark Gibbs, Zachary R.W. Johnson, George Thindwa, Bwambale Robert Musubaho, Laurence A. Moran, Violine Namyalo, Kareem Muhssin, A.M., Takudzwa Mazwienduna, Sarah Mills, Terry Murray, Gary McLelland, Tina Block, Isaiah Akorita, Jen Takahashi, Caleb Lack, Nsajigwa I Mwasokwa (Nsajigwa Nsa'sam), Angelos Sofocleous, Christine M. Shellska, Suzie Mason, Avery Sapoznikow, Cheri Frazer, Ian Bushfield, Angel Sumka, Mohammed Charlie Khadra, Chiedozie Uwakwe, Bayo Opadeyi, Moninuola Komolafe, Terry Sanderson, David Orenstein, Mother of Trans Child, Mark A. Gibbs, Imam Syed Soharwardy, Renton Patterson, Jon King, Rome Bethea, Sophie Shulman, Reva Landau, Janet French, Monica Miller, Bamidele Adeneye, George Ongere, Diego Fontanive, Waleed Al Husseini, Jessica Schab, Angelos Sofocleous, Faisal Saeed Al Mutar, Anouar Majid, Houzan Mahmoud, Dr. Paul Munyenyembe, Minister Gretta Vosper, Kathy Dawson, Lee Moore, Joseph Lagumbay, Allie Jackson, Michael Kruse, Uthman Khan, Mike Ivanov, John Brown, Rich Lyons, Dave McKee, Rick Heller, Kuya Manzano, Yasmine Mohammed, Lita Bablitz, Leslea Mair, Helen Austen, Peter Gajdics, Charlotte Frances Littlewood, Dr. Leo Igwe, Angie Johnson, Ellen Wiebe, Devon P. Hargreaves, Gil Leclair, Roger C., Greg Oliver, Bruce Gleason, Tammy Pham, Moses Kamya, Arifur Rahman, Andrew Seidel, Diego Fontanive, David Orenstein, Joyce Arthur, Steven Tomlins, Gordon Henry Guyatt, Colleen MacQuarrie, Catherine Dunphy, Pete, Stephen LeDrew, Ammar Anwer, Teemu Taira, Christopher Haggarty-Weir, Gauri Hopkins, Roger Dubar, Lucas Lynch, Frances Garner, John Carpay, EJ Hill, Damon Conlan, Scott, Anouar Majid, Melissa Krawczyk, Tim Klapproth, Diana Bucur, Kevin and Benedict, Dina Holford, Justine Nelson, Matt Sheedy, Abiodun Sanusi, Bishop George Kuhn, Suzanna Mason, Robert Jensen, Sarah WilkinsLaFlamme, Benjamin David, Clovis Munezero, Aloys Habonimana, Andrew Copson, Stephen Law, Amardeo Sarma, Will Lane, Tom McLeish, Gordon Guyatt, Rakshit Sharma, Mandisa Thomas, Scott (Skeptic Meditations), Waleed Al-Husseini, Vivek Sinha, Hari Parekh, Ghada Ibrahim, Stephen Skyvington, Paul VanderKlay, Amitabh Pal, Sodfa Daaji, Molly Hanson, Marieme Helie Lucas, Bwambale Robert Musubaho, Sara Al Iraqiya, Vidita Priyadarshini, Prof. Imam Soharwardy, Justin Trottier, Ian Bushfield, Karrar Al Asfoor, Nacer Amari, Ismail Mohamed, Anthony Pinn, Rev. Tim Bowman, Usama al-Binni, Carline Klijnman, Shif Gadamsetti, Mir Faizal, Obaid Omer, Karen Garst, Andy Steiger, Melanie Wilderman, Claire Klingenberg, Anonymous LGBTQ+ and An Atheist Community Member from Egypt, Arya Parsipur, Shanaaz Gokool, Anonymous Egyptian Author, Freethinker, and Translator, Jim Haught, Dominic Omenai, Ebenezer Odubule, Vahyala Kwaga, Claire Klingenberg, Diane Burkholder, Zachiam Bayei, Bentley Davis, Agnes Vishnevkin, Jummai Mohammed, Nacer Amari, Dave Solmes, Agness Bweye, Yazan, Zilan, Felicia Cravens, Lynn Perrin, Brad Strelau, Gleb Tsipursky, Howard Burman, Elisabeth Mathes, Sven van de Wetering, Vikram Parahoo, Leo Igwe, "Going to Hell for Laughing" Administrator, Terri Hope, Brian Dunning, Michel Virard, Tim Mendham, Barrie Webster, Perry Jacobs, Fredric L. Rice, Louis Dubé, Heather Pentler, Gayle Jordan, Jacob Mounts, Edward Seaborne, Ann Reid, Doug Thomas, Donald Lacey, Tim Ward, Ryan Boone, Raghen Lucy, Kristine Klopp, Rick O'Keefe, David Kelley, Chris - Administrator, "Humans for Science, Reason and Humanism", Bakari Chavanu, Frances Coombe, Dr. Tung LAM, CBE, Patrick Morrow, Doha Mooh, Megan Denman, Mark Newton, Marquita Tucker, Philip Nitschke, Carmenza Ochoa Uribe, Ian Wood, Keith Pennington, Kim Newton, Joyce Arthur, Carly Gardner, Faye Girsh, Karis Burkowski, Jim Lyttle, Robyn E. Blumner, Silvia Park, Derek Humphry, Judith Daley, Meredith Doig, Raghen Lucy, Ruth von Fuchs, Margaret Downey, Deo Ssekitoleko, Matthew Krevat, Merja Soisaari-Turriago, Amanda Poppei, William Flynn, Bryan Oates, Lynn Perrin, Sandra Z. Zellick,

Asuncion Alvarez del Río, Bwambale Musubaho Robert, Soma – Administrator, "Secular Indian," Claudette St. Pierre, Rob Jonquiere, Anne Landman, Lucie Jobin, Amanda Poppei, Payira Bonnie, John Hamill, Brian Stack, Jason Torpy, Christopher Smith, Roy Speckhardt, Zenaido Quintana, Jim Hudlow, Michael Cluff, Rob Boston, René Hartmann, Dave Helgager, Jeanne Arthur, Randy Best, Jos Helmich, and the Administrator of "Bengali Ex Muslims Republic," Susan Nambejja, Dorothy Hays, August Berkshire, Milad Resaeimanesh, Takudzwa Mazwienduna, Scott Sharrad, Haafizah Bhamjee, Justin Scott, Mubarak Bala, Hope Knutsson, Bill Norsworthy, Mark Brandt, Professor Kenneth Miller, Liz Jacka, John Hont, Alton Narcissity Mungani, Bill Cooke, Peter Harrison, Henry Morgentaler, Humanists of Linn County, Denise Robert Nola, Ngaire McCarthy, Abderrahmane M'hiri, Alex Rosenberg, Nicole Infinity, Richard S. Russell, Harris Sultan, Kwabena "Michael" Osei-Assibey, Miriam de Bontridder, Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson, Kelly – Brights Community Clusters (BCCs) Coordinator, Nik J. Gray, Annie Laurie, Courtney of "The Free Speech Podcast", John Seager, Administrator of "Gay Ex Muslim", Geoffrey Rosenthal, Administrator of "Ex-Muslim Memes", Azis, George Martin, Shannon Hardy, Administrator of "Ex-Muslims of India", Rob Boston, Emma Duke, Richael, Lois Backus, Doris Lin, Norman Finkelstein, and James. I feel honored to contribute to Canadian Atheist.

Scott



Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 2, 2019

Abderrahmane M'hiri is an ex-Muslim. Here we talk about his journey, in brief.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you grow up?

Abderrahmane M'hiri: I have grown up in a Muslim country and society in a Muslim family.

Jacobsen: What was upbringing for you?

M'hiri: I began to question since a young age "about 13-years-old."

Jacobsen: When did you begin to question Islam?

M'hiri: The first reason for me to leave Islam was the tremendous amount of violence and bloodthirst. The way the Quran treats the female gender. And then the scientific and historical mistakes that the Quran is crowded with.

Jacobsen: What reason or reasons lead to leaving Islam?

M'hiri: The outcome was very devastating and the struggle started from there. I was taken by the police from the high school after one of the students told his family I was questioning God and his mother immediately informed the school supervisor.

Jacobsen: In terms of the outcomes, how did family, friends, and community, even strangers, react to you?

M'hiri: Friends were mostly aggressive and in some cases it ended with violence. And 2 years ago, I had faced a major aggression from a group of muslim extremist which resulted in my arm being broken.

Jacobsen: What are you trying to do now?

M'hiri: Now, I am trying to seek asylum in Denmark, so I can at least breathe peacefully.

Jacobsen: How can people help?

M'hiri: Any help to bring the story to the media in my case will be very important and I hope I can get the asylum here.

Jacobsen: How can newer or other ex-Muslims find their way, too?

M'hiri: All ex-Muslims in my opinion should work together and unite so we can always make sure we can help one another.

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

M'hiri: Thank you.

Interview with Professor Alex Rosenberg – R. Taylor Cole Professor of Philosophy, Duke University

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 2, 2019

Professor Alex Rosenberg is the R. Taylor Cole Professor of Philosophy at Duke University. Here we talk about his life, views, and work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was early life like for you, e.g., geography, culture, language, religion or lack thereof, education, and family structure and dynamics?

Professor Alex Rosenberg: I was born after the Second World War in Austria, my parents were refugees from Poland. We emigrated the US in 1949 and I lived in several rural locations before moving New York City at the age of 9.

My father was a physician and my mother became a social worker in the US, eventually teaching at Columbia U. I have a fraternal twin brother. Our upbringing was secular and non-religious.

Jacobsen: What levels of formal education have been part of life for you? How have you informally self-educated?

Rosenberg: My formal education continued and still continues long after my PhD at the age of 23. Being an academic means you are continually educating yourself. Is it informal? Perhaps.

No courses exams and grades, but you have to meet academic standards in what you write and argue for. That's formal. I spend a few years after becoming a full professor going back to grad school, studying, molecular biology. Made a huge difference to my understanding.

Jacobsen: Within your extensive academic and literary career, what do you see as your most enduring contributions to Academia and to the written canon of nonbelievers?

Rosenberg: I suspect that "The Atheist's Guide to Reality" and "How History Gets Things Wrong: The Neuroscience of our Addiction to Stories" will outlast my other academic writing.

But I fear both will be long forgotten before people stop reading my novels. The first of them, "The Girl from Krakow" is atheistic in its tenor.

Jacobsen: What arguments best support the atheist position?

Rosenberg: The strongest positive support for atheism is science, physics and biology. "The Atheist's Guide" sketches the science that strongly supports atheism. In it I hope to show what else atheist's need to believe about reality, and why it all so strongly supports atheism.

The strongest negative support is the argument from evil against theism. For me that argument has been more of a motivation to search for positive arguments that support atheism.

Jacobsen: What arguments best respond to the or counter the strongest arguments for the theist position?

Rosenberg: As I said, the argument from evil. It is psychologically the most effective argument and the epistemic version is philosophically the most cogent one.

Jacobsen: For those who do not know, what best defines Darwinian Reductionism? How does this provide an explanatory framework for our innate and culturally developed ethics in addition to our cognitive capacities as primates?

Rosenberg: Darwinian reductionism is just my label for the way molecular biology relates to the rest of biology. It's a label for an academic thesis.

The label for my explanatory claims about our cognitive capacities, ethical doctrines and social structures is more broadly "disenchanted naturalism" and more narrowly "nice nihilism"—the doctrine that our ethical values constrain us to be largely civilized to one another, nice, but don't have a firm or any foundation.

Jacobsen: Most views of atheism come in the form of negation or denial of the existence of gods or a singular God.

If we take the stance of atheism given within the affirmative arguments presented in the earlier responses, what ethics are more likely to follow or be implied by an atheistic view of the cosmos?

Rosenberg: No ethical view follows from atheism... that's too limited a basis for any conclusions beyond the nonexistence of god. It's the (scientific) premises of arguments against God's existence that have such implications.

Generally, they resign us to the emptiness of arguments for the objectivity of the core morality we all share—atheists and theists, while reassuring us that mostly we are cooperative, altruistic, sociable creatures who get along with one another pretty well... under conditions of moderate scarcity.

Jacobsen: Why does our innate predisposition for narrative, for oral stories, bias our comprehension of history, when presented as narrative? How can we alleviate the misrepresentations of this narrative bias to better gain access to the truth of the past?

Rosenberg: We're the result of a Darwinian process that selected for storytellers as a solution to the design problem of collaboration and cooperation on the African savanna in the Pleistocene.

Neuroscience shows that this adaptation was a quick and dirty but quite crude solution to the problem and that now we are living with its consequences for human institutions that are often harmful.

If we want to get a grip on our past, we need to surrender the demand for story telling and substitute scientific modeling. That's what "How History Gets Things Wrong" is all about.

Jacobsen: How can people become involved through the donation of time, the addition of membership, links to professional and personal networks, giving monetarily, exposure in interviews or writing articles, and so on?

Rosenberg: I don't know how they can do that, but doing it is rewarding psychologically...we were shaped to be nice, and that means sharing enlightenment with others.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts based on the conversation today?

Rosenberg: It's easier to be a Canadian atheist than an American one. I wish I had not forgone my chance to be a Canadian atheist when I left Nova Scotia almost 44 years ago!

Despite the weather, you should enjoy your nations' moral superiority to America.

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

Rosenberg: It's my great pleasure, Scott.

	13
Interview with Nicole Infinity – Camp Coordinato Camp Quest North	r,
Scott Douglas Jacobsen	

April 3, 2019

Nicole Infinity is the Camp Coordinator for Camp Quest North. Here we talk about he life, views, and work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was early life like for you? Did religion play a role in it?

Nicole Infinity: Tumultuous. I was baptized at the age of 7 into the Lutheran Church. My half-sister, then an infant, older brother, and I were baptized at the same time.

I took classes and had earned the right to be confirmed in the church, but I just didn't believe. It was a progressive church, I had several friends there, and I even had some god feelings, but it just wasn't right for me. It is where I found my love of camp though. I attended Christikon.

A week-long summer camp in Montana. Twenty other kids and I drove from Minnesota on a school bus each summer to attend this camp set in the mountains where we reflected, sang, hiked, danced, and camped. I fell in love.

At 16, I stopped going because I just couldn't pretend anymore. I was at a point where I was questioning everything around me and the church and camp were not places I could do that.

Jacobsen: If you reflect on pivotal people within the community relevant to personal philosophical development, who were they for you?

Infinity: Honestly, I have little interest in atheist prophets, but I recognize that some are very important as people transition from deity belief to a secular life. However, discussions with close friends and the Camp Quest community have helped guide my personal philosophies.

Jacobsen: What about literature and film, and other artistic and humanities productions, of influence on personal philosophical worldview?

Infinity: All of the above, of course. When I was a very angry teenager it was *Requiem for a Dream* and *Fight Club*. Now, I am open to a subtler approach. I feel there is a power in foreign film to make the world smaller and personalities, feelings, and beliefs more familiar.

The films of Hirokazu Kore-eda, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Pedro Almodovar are ones that come to mind first. Where do we go now? or Et maintenant on va où?, Eat Drink Man Woman, Antonia's Line, Lucky, Jihad for Love, The Way He Looks, and Monsoon Wedding are also films I find to have many truths.

The writing of Sandra Cisneros, Bell Hooks, Roald Dahl, Amy Tan, Allison Beckdel, Elizabeth Gilbert, and Craig Thompson also ring true to me as well.

Books made for young people as well like *The Big Orange Splot*, Charlotte's *Web*, and *Haroon and the Sea of Stories*. Artwork and music have always been an influence, but there is too much to even mention.

Jacobsen: How did you come into contact with the Camp Quest programs and initiatives? What were your initial impressions?

Infinity: As an educator, I attended a conference in where Camp Quest was tabling among hundreds of other youth development and educational organizations in a huge open room.

I happened to walk past the table. That was the first time I had heard of a secular summer camp. Having loved attending summer camp as a child and young woman, I applied immediately to be a camp counselor that summer.

After volunteering at the camp that summer, I was hooked. I was surrounded by other people who I felt I could be open with and supported by. The campers were like any other group of kids; excited, curious, and energetic.

Expect, all of these young people were being raised in secular or half-secular households. I joined the board that fall. It was 2009 and I have been with the camp since.

Jacobsen: As you work for Camp Quest North, what are the associated tasks and responsibilities coming with the position?

Infinity: Overnight camp is a unique experience for campers and counselors. When I began, my role was a volunteer counselor.

I joined the board of directors, became head counselor and continued with camp each summer. Eventually, I became a camp director. For the past few years, I have been the camp coordinator.

We have grown from a camp of 13 campers in 2004 to a camp of 140 campers in 2018. We began with one week of camp and now run four weeks including a week long day camp for younger kiddos.

Currently, I facilitate planning the schedule and activities, purchase and maintain supplies, organize and lead retreats, coordinate with the board of directors, communicate with parents and counselors, and work to continue to grow camp.

All of this while recognizing that we are working with young people ages 4 to 17 and our main goals are to help people become compassionate, questioning, and active. We also have many safety considerations. There are many different pieces of running a successful summer camp.

Although we are not adding a new week to camp this summer, we are making one of our week's gender inclusive. During this week, campers will be placed into cabins by age regardless of gender identity.

As a secular organization, I feel we have the power to be radically inclusive and progress in a way that is based on evidence. We try to incorporate that into all we do.

Jacobsen: What have been some of the more touching experiences while in the community? What have been the difficulties working with youth?

Infinity: Through camp, I have found a community of supportive and thoughtful people who I love and trust. Two of my kids' guide parents are people I met at Camp Quest.

It is a multi-generational community of people working together to have fun and think deeply about how we can shape the world into a better place for everyone.

Although I have always loved working with young people, I realize there are some difficulties. Our toughest challenge is when parents sign kids up for camp, but the kids don't really want to be there.

The week-long video game/smart phone detox is a bit much for some kiddos. However, I truly believe that overnight camp, not just Camp Quest, has a unique power to build character, create independence, and open minds.

Jacobsen: How do you coordinate programs and initiatives with other Camp Quest directors?

Infinity: We begin planning the next summer of camp in October at our yearly Planning Retreat with any counselor and board member who is interested.

There, we choose a theme and change the schedule as needed. Camp Quest Inc. also holds a yearly Leadership Summit where camps get together to share ideas. There are also some online sharing sources which are currently being developed more fully.

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

Interview with Richard S. Russell – Co-Founder, Atheists and Agnostics of Wisconsin

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 4, 2019 Richard S. Russell is the Co-Founder of Atheists and Agnostic of Wisconsin. Here we talk about his life, views, and work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was family background, and personal background, especially with regards to atheism and religion in particular, in brief?

Richard S. Russell: I was raised in a household where my father was Presbyterian and my mother was previously Eastern Orthodox. But since there were no Eastern Orthodox churches around, they attended the Presbyterian Church. My sister and I went to Sunday School.

By the time I went to high school, I was teaching Sunday School, but I had begun to question almost all of it. By the time I got out of high school, I didn't really have much of the belief left.

Jacobsen: With regards to Atheists and Agnostics of Wisconsin, why was it originally founded?

Russell: It started as a chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, as "FFRF Madison". For whatever reason, we seem to have rubbed the FFRF national leadership the wrong way.

We could never figure out how we had done that. Maybe they were nervous, at the time, about having people who could just drop in on them at a moment's notice. But we kept trying to make nice with them. They just became more and more suspicious of what we were up to.

We never understood what that was about. They said, "You can't name your organization, the FFRF something." We thought this was strange, as they already had an FFRF Pennsylvania and an FFRF New Jersey. So, we named ourselves Rationalists of Greater Madison, but still maintained as a chapter of the FFRF.

This came to a head in 1992 at their national convention, when a number of a people from our chapter were personally pilloried by the FFRF inner council. Again, we had no idea why this was happening.

They came up with all sorts of excuses that we were a disruptive force. They, basically, ended that convention with a passing of a constitutional amendment that the Board of Directors of the FFRF can expel any chapter. And, a week later, we were notified that the board had in fact expelled RGM on a 7-2 vote.

There was no hearing, no notice, no opportunity to say anything. The members of Rationalists of Greater Madison as individuals then dropped out of FFRF. We still have no idea what we did to piss them off.

This kind of purge is, of course, not at all uncommon in the atheist movement.

Madalyn Murray O'Hair of American Atheists threw out chapters of its own. FFRF itself comprised people excommunicated from AA. The idea of internal purges is disheartening.

Meanwhile, we had started to get participation from outside the Madison area. At that point, we said, 'We can't be that parochial anymore." We decided to rename ourselves the Atheists and Agnostics of Wisconsin.

Then we heard about the Atheists Alliance International, a group of local organizations that had also run afoul of AA but had banded together on the basis of democratic principles rather than top-down authoritarianism.

Jacobsen: Then this also leads to AAW being defunct?

Russell: I wouldn't say it is defunct. I have gone off to do other things. I believe AAW as an organization is still continuing. I am no longer active with it. Carol Smith could tell you more. At some point, our existence had 90% concentrated in the Madison area. As we got more from the rest of Wisconsin, it became more difficult to host in-person meetings.

We tried to turn this into an email discussion group that only met a few times a year for celebrations. It became harder and harder to do things face-to-face. It put us on the road to dissolution, because we did not have personal contact.

Jacobsen: For those who may be questioning their faith and may be looking for an organization leaning towards skepticism, agnosticism, and so on, what can you tell them about social and communal activities and organizations?

Russell: There are a couple of different avenues available for people. The Unitarian Universalist society has what they call meeting houses. They hold meetings – I guess you would call them – not services.

They hold the place for non-religious people that a church would hold for religious people. Sunday Assembly is for young couples who want something to do with their kids. We had a Sunday Assembly here in Madison. They ended up disbanding as well.

For an online resource, I am part of the Madison Skeptics Meetup. It is very strongly proscience. We have 98% atheists. It helps us make contact with other people. Anyone can host a meeting. If others are interested, they can show up.

My wife and I host an atheist lounge every month. We pick a topic and then have an hour of discussion. We host at a local restaurant. That has turned out to be quite popular. We will host a book discussion too.

Our next one, for a book called Nudge will be held in March. In May, we have a series of books. They are small discussion groups help in the living room. But they are entertaining.

Jacobsen: As we move further into 2019, what are hopes and fears in the US for you?

Russell: The Supreme Court scares us. There are five Catholics on it which is bad news for reproductive rights and church-state separation. The hopeful sign is more young people are turning away from religion as mostly useless. The future is bright but the present has some problems.

Jacobsen: Do you think there is going to be a split happening between generations in a way, but also the ways in which the laws could be set while the younger generations coming up are more and more secular?

Russell: The evidence of progress is making the traditionalists crack down stronger on the progress against their traditions. It is a struggle uphill against an awful lot of entrenched interests. Those interests have control over the levers of power, have had for some time.

It is a resurgence of racism and religious fundamentalism in America. It is a cause for concern. No matter how much I see the beliefs of the young, they tend to not be activists. The activists tend to be older people who are more set in their ways and set in their religious traditions.

Those people have set molasses on the gears of progress. We are moving forward more slowly. It is the same problems that the progressive forces have had through all of history.

Jacobsen: What do you recommend for young people to enter the organizations, form the coalitions, and become more active, as this does impact their lives?

Russell: For young people, many of them are tied up with college trying to get skills that will be good in the job world. The idea that we, in the past, could graduate from college and get a job with a good and reliable employer. You're loyal to them; they're loyal to you. You get a pension and then retire.

Those days are over. They will switch jobs 4 or 5 times if they get to retire at all. Those are things that they are grappling with. Activism is, frankly, way down on the list. They are trying to get in touch with families. They are on social media. There are a lot of demands on their attention.

I am not surprised there is not too much activism. What can be done? It is going to be focusing on climate change that will impact the second half of their lives. The fact is that climate change is helping only a coalition of the wealthy That coalition is a threat to their future existence.

But while it is really easy to see where the wealthy are helping themselves, they can have a great many religious allies; this needs to get out to the older people to keep making those points. The first point about the wealth influencing social policy is so blatantly obvious.

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

Ask Mubarak 2 – This is Nigeria: Freedom of Expression for the Secular

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 4, 2019

Mubarak Bala is the President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria. We will be conducting this educational series to learn more about humanism and secularism within Nigeria. Here we talk about Nigerian freethought and freedom of expression.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In a song by Falz, inspired by the work of Childish Gambino, entitled "This is Nigeria," one of the reactions to the video reflects something interesting around the world.

The religious preachers, pastors, imams, and others, at times, can simply spread falsehoods without consequence, e.g., legal action or other threats. Then someone – Falz – speaks, in an artistic production, on organized religion and gets a threat of legal action by a religious organization, the Muslim Rights Concern.

Does this reflection a typical double standard in the discourse towards Nigerian society's arts and culture community by the religious? Does this reflect other issues around freedom of expression for secular compared to other Nigerians?

Because they have this right to freedom of expression in the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* Article 19 and the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria in Section 39(1).

Mubarak Bala: Typically, secularists and atheists the world over, are quite misunderstood and often misrepresented.

The more the society is religious the higher the contempt and disdain. They think it's a favor to befriend or even allow you live, have a job or date you.

The video by FALZ drew their ire, but they quickly realized, that they were giving the song more popularity with the controversy and withdrew their threat of litigation.

There are funnier incidences, sometimes they win, other times they lose. But the positive outcome of it is that our community gets more analysis by the typical, normal citizens, and they now see us for who we are.

Just this morning, see what I woke up to:

Atheists, too, deserve Buhari's cabinet appointment

In fact, this incidence you mentioned was not the first, two years ago, Akon and a few other Hollywood stars intervened in a case of a Muslim actress from northern Nigeria, after we publicized her case online, so vigorously that the clerics were forced to swallow their fatwa.

They decreed that she should marry, and banned her from Kannywood, the local film industry. Her crime: singing and holding hands with a male teenager. Her name is Rahma Sadau, her cosinger, Classiq. A Christian male from the region.

Her case gave them the shivers because he is controversial, does not conform to the conservative rules they imposed and fights misogyny in the industry. A Muslim girl with a nonMuslim associating even if on camera is strictly frowned upon.

When Goodluck Jonathan (President 2010-2015) provided seed money in billions of naira, millions in dollars, to fund the booming northern Nigerian film industry dominated by Muslims, the clerics mound and fought it with all their might, until it was scrapped. An attempted revival

by the current President also hit the rocks, as the clerics lobby has great voting blocks in the region.

Ironically, a few months after their jihad against this 'Zionist agenda' to dilute Muslim morality with joy and entertainment, the Saudi Prince, MBS launched his cinema and entertainment industry, so huge that Hollywood would be jealous. The clerics were now confused.

So all in all, in this region of the world, conservatives try hard to fight art, liberalism, secularism as well as anything new. They mostly target the female more, FALZ just happened to show girls in hijab dancing the 'Shaku Shaku', which is what really caught their attention.

He was drawing attention to recent abductions and forceful conversations to Islam, of Christian students in northern Nigeria. Those that did not, are killed or enslaved, as Islam would have wanted.

Just this week, my long term friend and Humanist publicly discarded humanism and converted to Islam at the national Mosque in the capital, when online zealots raised ire, that she was promoting sex education by selling sex items and or providing counsel about male and female orgasm.

The online Mullahs of the fanatic sect of Islam called for her boycott, and sternly warned her, her apologies only drew more to call for her head. She then decided to seek the best protection around, since we could not help her with anything beyond online defense, neither would the government.

She is now donning the 'Proud to be a Muslim' tag on her Facebook page, Muneerat Abdussalam, and the region, is celebrating her, including those that just a few days ago posted that they would mob her and behead her.

It is either a case of genuine conversion through Stockholm Syndrome, or a ploy to be safe, as all the other atheists do in this part of the world, be safe, just to survive.

I knew what she's going through when she says they almost made her commit suicide due to the threats. I knew exactly how it feels. Then I know, at least I'm male, it is why I was spared. They hate women more.

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

Interview with Harris Sultan – Author & Founder, "Ex Muslim Atheist"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 5, 2019

Harris Sultan is an Author and the Founder of "Ex Muslim Atheist." Here we talk about his life, views, and work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was early life like for you, e.g., geography, culture, language, religion or lack thereof, education, and family structure and dynamics?

Harris Sultan: I was born in Lahore, Pakistan. My father at the time was working as an engineer in Saudi Arabia so my sister, myself and my mum moved to Saudi Arabia.

My family left Saudi Arabia when I was two years old so I don't have any memory of it but I often wonder how my life would have been had my family stayed there. I was always a bit curious but now when I meet other ex-Muslim atheists and just atheists, I've realised I wasn't so special after all.

Jacobsen: What levels of formal education have been part of life for you? How have you informally self-educated?

Sultan: I went to a Christian school in Lahore. I did my high school there. We go to college for the 11th and 12th year of school and I managed to get into Govt. College Lahore, one of Pakistan's best colleges. After that, I moved to Australia in 2003 for my undergraduate studies. I graduated in IT in 2007 and became an Australian citizen in 2008.

Jacobsen: What was the path towards becoming an ex-Muslim, as well as an atheist, for you? What differs from that path compared to those who travel from Islam simply into another faith?

Sultan: I've written my journey in detail in my book so I hope your readers will buy my book, available on Amazon and all your favourite bookstores:). I was always interested in the God question.

I came up with Pascal's wager on my own when I was in college and believe it or not, I actually came up with the conclusion that it is probably best if I believed in God because if he doesn't exist, it wouldn't matter, if he does, I'll be fine. I was up and down with the God question but never really thought about renouncing Islam.

I had become fairly moderate or what I like to call, a hypocrite which is a good thing. I always say a good Muslim (Jihadi) is a bad human (terrorist) and a bad Muslim (feminist, non-homophobic) is actually a good human.

I remember sometime in 2005 or 2006 I got hold of a news article here in an Australian newspaper where a journalist was trying to attack Richard Dawkins.

Even though it was severely biased and now I know how the journalist was strawmaning and even misrepresenting Dawkins, it was still Dawkins' arguments that were making more sense to me, be it evolution or God in general. This made me look up Dawkins a little more and then I found a treasure trove on this "New Atheism".

All of a sudden I had these hundreds of hours of videos and lectures and debates of people like Dawkins and Hitchens. I was smitten, all the questions I had in my mind and answers that I wanted to give but couldn't articulate were now being presented in the most eloquent of ways.

I then read "The God Delusion" and became a convinced atheist. I openly credit Richard Dawkins for arming with the arguments against God.

I always wondered why one person would leave one mythical religion and join another one? My main problem with Islam was the idea of this supernatural God that has absolutely no evidence.

Even if the Quran was the most benign book, I still would have had a problem with the philosophy surrounding the existence of God. I never felt the desire to have a belief in anything that is not supported by any evidence.

This is where I think the difference lies between ex-Muslim atheists and ex-Muslims who turn to other faiths. These are the people who still want to believe in a God but are disenchanted with the bad morality in Islam and in the character of Muhammad.

Therefore, they turn to Christianity or Hinduism. I must add that in my experience most ex-Muslims turn out to be atheists but this could be my data bias as only those ex-Muslims get in touch with me who turn atheists.

Ex-Muslim Christians or ex-Muslim Hindus (I only know of one) go to other places to share their views. It would be interesting to do an advanced survey on ex-Muslims to find out if they have become atheists or adopted another religion.

Jacobsen: Can you explain to our audience the confrontation with Uthman Badar, please? What was the big takeaway from the experience for you?

Sultan: Well, I kind of knew what his position on apostates was. He is a hardcore Salafi (a literalist who follows the Quran literally and believes in all the Sunni Hadiths). I knew he had professed on record that apostates should be killed.

I just expected him to give a straight forward answer that he had already given in the past and demonstrate some intellectual honesty. He did get in a bit of trouble last time for saying it so I was just expecting him to explain why apostates should be killed but he was slipperier than I thought. He kept dancing around but wouldn't give a straight answer.

Since he wasn't giving a straight answer, I asked him if he had changed his stated position to which he replied he hadn't meant he was still for the killing of apostates.

Before the debate, I had expected him to be intellectually honest and own publicly what he believes in private but I found him not to be of such calibre.

It wasn't just the apostasy question, I made so many points on Islam regarding homophobia, misogyny etc. but he wouldn't comment on anything.

My conclusion of him is that he should keep doing what he is doing, he is good for us, more the likes of him talk, more the questioning Muslims will leave Islam.

Jacobsen: In the context of the growing non-religious community around the world in raw numbers and in terms of the growing numbers of ex-Muslims, especially in the open and frank ones with online platforms, what is the next step?

Sultan: In my view, we should keep this onslaught on religion. We are going through a very unique time in history, not only that we have the best tools available to facilitate the flow of information, but we also happen to be living in a time when we can openly attack the bad ideas of religion, at least in the secular countries.

We shouldn't take this for granted. The religions of the world are facing the toughest battle for their survival and we shouldn't relent. If we don't root out religion from the very fabric of our society, it can always come back in its original form or an even more dangerous form.

Jacobsen: What would be the basis for the construction of a global ex-Muslim organization, especially with the rise of the councils, the online groups, and the greater comprehension of questioning Muslims and ex-Muslims of their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of belief, and freedom of conscience under the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Sultan: It's not just the non-Islamic religions that are facing this onslaught from atheists and secularists, it is probably Islam that is caught the most off guard. The ex-Muslim councils and online groups are popping out of nowhere and their memberships are soaring in numbers.

20 years ago, the Islamic establishments of the world, would never in their wildest dreams have imagined this. Now, it's not just the 'west' they have to fight, it's the people from within their ranks, the native informants as they like to call us, that have become their biggest headache.

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the biggest exporter of the hardcore Salafi Islam exporter, branded atheists as terrorists in 2015.

It's probably true to some extent, they are terrified of atheists and their free thinking. Our numbers are growing and with each new ex-Muslim on our side, we get stronger and they get weaker.

It is only a matter of time when our numbers will be so immense that the UN and the western powers will have no choice but to pressurise Islamic countries to change their ways and stop hunting down atheists and free thinkers.

Our biggest challenge is to motivate people and unite them to stand up for their rights. Not all atheists can flee to western countries and I am waiting for the day when these people will stand up and start a revolution.

Jacobsen: What are the main threats to ex-Muslims, individually and collectively now?

Sultan: The physical threat is always there, especially for public ex-Muslims. Only a couple of days ago I was warned by a charged criminal to "watch my back".

This threat is not only just for publicly open ex-Muslims but the violence is so ingrained in Islam that anyone who even thinks about leaving Islam, immediately starts thinking about the consequences.

This might have served as a tool for the survival of Islam but it is also turning out to be a weapon against Islam.

This brutal hold over people's thoughts is, at least in the 21st century, making young questioning ex-Muslims angry and I mean very angry.

I just hope there wouldn't be any bloodshed but when a significantly large number of atheists is achieved say in, Pakistan or Egypt, there will be a clash if the governments there don't change their ways.

It has already started happening in Iran, a huge number of ex-Muslims are not just politely criticising Islam, but they are actually hating Islam now, they are burning the Qurans and the burqas openly. There have been at least two attempts in the last 10 years for a revolution.

In my view, it's only a matter of time when the Islamic Republic of Iran is overthrown. We just have to gather our forces and keep exposing the barbarity of the governments of these Muslim countries.

Jacobsen: What is the main tool of the extremists – not ordinary Muslims but ultraconservatives – in attracting people into their ranks and for their fundamentalist causes?

Sultan: Quran sitting in a closet of some Muslim household is like a rifle sitting in a house of an ordinary American.

The tool for death and destruction is right there but most members of the household are just not aware of either its presence or its utility.

But every now and then we will have someone who will realise this, open the closet, understand its power and use it! Quran is essentially a bomb waiting to explode in the minds of young Muslims.

In the current climate, geopolitics, conflict of Israel and Palestine have a huge part but neither I nor a lot of other people are fully sold on this. There was no state of Israel before 1948 yet there have been clashes between the West and the East throughout the 1400-year history of Islam.

Thomas Jefferson, then an ambassador in the late 18th century reported to his superior in Paris that the Tripoli pirates on the coast of Africa held the view that the westerners, non-Muslims are meant to be enslaved. That report by Jefferson looks like a report from some CIA operative on ISIS.

Islam wants to spread either by proselytisation or by the sword, it doesn't matter, it has to spread. Islam will keep successfully producing those Jihadis until Islam is either fully gone or severely modified.

200 years ago I could have been saying the same about Christianity as it was probably the bigger menace at that time but Christianity, as a religion has come a long way but Islam hasn't.

Every major Islamic country you look at (barring Turkey), Islam is deeply rooted in their political structure. Unless Islam changes or evolves, these Islamic countries won't change.

Once the violence from the Quran and Hadith is eliminated, there will be more will in the governments to act against the jihadi recruiters. I discussed that in my book how I, a teenage boy from an upper-middle-class household, almost became a jihadi.

Since my father was never interested in the violent Islam, he managed to pull me out of it but I could have been dead for 20 years for some crazy mullah's dream of conquering Indian occupied Kashmir in the name of Islam.

I wish I could say its only geopolitics, you resolve Israel-Palestinian conflict, everything will be fine but I will be severely deluding myself.

Jacobsen: How can people become involved through the donation of time, the addition of membership, links to professional and personal networks, giving monetarily, exposure in interviews or writing articles, and so on, to the global ex-Muslim movement?

Sultan: The Ex-Muslim movement is still relying on the backs of volunteers. People like me donate a huge chunk of our time for something none of us gets paid for. In addition to our time, we also attract a risk of safety. I was recently threatened by a Muslim not far from my house.

I was thinking if this crazy person does manage to find out where I live, I could be in serious trouble. I am a little disappointed in the attitude of atheists in general. We don't tend to support each other as much as we need to.

Yes, our numbers are rising but this is no time to sit back, we need to keep it going, we need to keep supporting each other. Every time you share or like our tweets or videos, you help, if you can, please do support people like me on Patreon, buy books written by atheist writers and share the ideas.

Remember, this is the only time in history when us atheists can actually challenge religions openly, let's not take it for granted. We can lose it very quickly.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts based on the conversation today?

Sultan: I'm glad you are doing it in the old school written format. I think we are overwhelmed by the podcasts and video interviews, some people like to read in the old fashioned way.

What you are doing is great, you are bringing like-minded people together and helping us spread our message. At times it might seem repetitive but the fact that the majority of people haven't heard these arguments shows how much we have to keep saying the same thing over and over again.

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

Sultan: Thank you for having me.

Ask Kwabena 1 – Chale: Welcome to the Humanist Community of Ghana!

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 5, 2019

Kwabena "Michael" Osei-Assibey is the President of the Humanist Association of Ghana. We will be conducting this educational series to learn more about humanism and secularism within Ghana. Here we talk about Ghanaian humanism in its flavour and community.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is the status of the Humanist Association of Ghana now? You took over from Roslyn. Your partner (Roslyn), certainly, set forth the progress of the humanist community in Ghana a lot. What are some upcoming events and activities, and developments, for 2019/2020?

Kwabena "Michael" Osei-Assibey: The focus since I took over was in creating more spaces in order to expand our audience. Central to that was establishing relationships with more organizations and laying the ground work for our first ever Freethinking Festival as part of our Freethinking Campus Initiative.

Let me take you back a bit. HAG organizes a Freethought meeting on the last Sunday of every month and has organized two successful 2 day conferences in the past. We have also been invited to talk about minority rights and critical thinking on several occasions on different platforms. However, this has never been enough and we have always had the urge to expand. The universities seemed like a pretty good place to start. After all, universities are supposed to be prime grounds for freethinking and critical thinking. I believe that was first of many erroneous assumptions.

A few of us organized and printed some flyers and went on a door-to-door campaign on campus to get a feel about what students thought about critical thinking and freethinking. We knocked on over a hundred doors and spoke to hundreds of students in the process. Nine out of ten times when we were invited into a room, there will be either a student listening to gospel music, reading a bible or showing clear hostility to the idea of humanism/atheism/agnosticism. This was indicative of and not different to already established sentiments and behavior of the general population.

Concurrently, we were struggling with finding a new "home", a place we can host our free-thought meetings and other programs. Over the past three years, Afia Beach Hotel had been our home. The owner, Helen List, is a member and generously let us use her space. However, the hotel was fighting a losing battle with the Government of Ghana, whom, in their infinite wisdom, was using eminent domain to take over the hotel and other property by the beach for the development of a "Marine Drive" project – a series of high rise properties. The irony is, even though she had been displaced, no compensation has yet to be paid to her. This tragedy was/is personal to every member of our organization.

It was also during this time that we undertook a constitutional review to include an additional officer, a communication officer, and review the duties of the executives. We also reviewed term limits and included a code of conducts. This was followed by elections. Our new executive body are, with me winning a second term as president, Eibhlín Ní Chléirigh as financial secretary (second term), Lloyd Thompson as Organizing Secretary (first term), Thaddeus Twumasi as Communications officer (new position and first term), as well as Emmanuel Wolley (first term) and Selasie Djameh (second term) as Council members. The team was voted in for a 2-year term.

Back to our up coming Freethought Festival. In August, we will be organizing the maiden 7-day Festival of Ideas (Freethought Festival) under the theme – Power Structures and we can change them. Given what we experienced on campus, we realized conversations like this, and others, were very much needed. We plan to have conversations on and around gender and sex, religion and governance, science and pseudoscience, arts and social change, mental health, and social change. We are planning a diverse group of panelists from scientists, to professors, artists, student leaders, and policy makers. We are very existed bout it. Although still in the planning phase, a lot of the potential panelist we spoke to are keen to be part of the conversations. Fostering conversation after the festival and growing our campus base will keep us very busy for the rest of the year.

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

Interview with Miriam de Bontridder – Board Member, Foundation The Einder

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 6, 2019

Miriam de Bontridder is a Board Member of the Foundation The Einder. Here we talk about her life, views, and work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was early life like for you, e.g., geography, culture, language, religion or lack thereof, education, and family structure and dynamics?

Miriam de Bontridder: The first 17 years of my life I lived in a small village in Flanders (Belgium). I have had a Catholic upbringing and until I went to Ghent for my studies, my mother required me to attend Mass every Sunday, even though I did not believe in (a) god since I reached the age of 13.

I was raised with rural values that were characterized by solidity.

Jacobsen: What levels of formal education have been part of life for you? How have you informally self-educated?

De Bontridder: At the University of Ghent (at the time a stronghold of progressivity) I studied Philosophy and then Law. I continued my law studies in Amsterdam, where I graduated in Dutch law and in International law. At the end of my career as a lawyer, I became deputy judge at the high court in Amsterdam.

Jacobsen: What tasks and responsibilities come with the Board Member position for Foundation The Einder?

De Bontridder: In 2013 I was approached to join the board of De Einder as a volunteer and to take on the portfolio of legal affairs there.

About De Einder I just knew at that time that it was founded in 1995 by a department of the Humanist Alliance in connection with two briefly successive events that took place in the same region. First a young man who jumped from an eleven storey apartment with death as a result, then a young woman who has thrown herself in front of a train with amputation of her lower limbs and a psychological trauma that could no longer be healed.

The question arose: 'how to humanise suicides' in the sense that someone who does not want to continue living is no longer dependent on cruel methods and means and where bystanders or relatives are spared as much as possible.

The question can also be described differently: how to prevent suicide? Not in the sense of what has come to be known as suicide prevention. No, in another sense, in the sense that the suicide is stripped of all horror and turned into a careful consideration process in which a person of sound mind, without being dependent on a physician, ends his life in a humane way after having gone through a rational and emotional process of consideration which ends up with the substantiated judgment that life has nothing or almost nothing positive for him anymore in prospect.

This form of suicide – stepping out of life without the intervention of a physician and using humane methods after a careful weighing process has been completed – De Einder calls 'self-euthanasia' or 'a careful suicide'.

As there is a provision in Dutch criminal law that makes assistance with suicide punishable the peculiar situation arises that cruel suicides are not in violation of the law, but careful suicides may conflict with the law. With regard to the prohibition of assisted suicide in the Dutch penal

code case law has arisen in which a distinction is made between punishable and non-punishable assistance in suicide.

What is allowed:

to provide general information

to give moral support (possibly by being present at the moment of suicide)

to conduct conversations about the intended suicide

What is not allowed:

to encourage suicide

to provide resources such as medicines intended for suicide

to instruct in the sense of giving an assignment with the intent that it is carried out

to take over the control

to carry out support activities around the execution

For the consultants of De Einder who inform people about how they can find death in a peaceful way, it is important that they act within the limits of the law. It is my task to supervise this.

Jacobsen: What have been some of the main struggles and victories for Foundation The Einder?

De Bontridder: Let me tell you what De Einder does. With that I give you both an image of its struggles and of its victories.

The vision and mission of De Einder is to discuss and implement a human death which is registered by the person himself. What does that mean? By 'a self registered human death' De Einder understands the completely voluntary decision to realise the end of one's own life using humane methods after a careful consideration process has taken place at which the legitimate interests of others have been taken into account.

According to De Einder, the fact that people have not asked for their own birth does not mean that they are also not allowed to control their death. In De Einder's view, everyone has the right to decide on his own end of life, even if that decision leads to the termination of that life. De Einder stands up for a right to die.

For the sake of convenience, I define the right to die as the right whereby someone with a death wish who fully oversees the consequences of carrying out this wish and who takes the legitimate interests of others into account in his decision making process, has access to safe and reliable means that result in a peaceful, self-chosen human death or has access to someone who is prepared to execute his wish to die peacefully.

People who come to De Einder sometimes have an acute death wish and sometimes have only a future death wish.

People with an acute death wish often suffer from chronic physical or psychological problems, or don't feel heard by their GP or specialist, or have been informed that their request can not be treated within the euthanasia law, or consider their lives as completed or do not want to use aggressive suicide methods.

People who do not have a direct death wish, are often driven by a desire to be in the possession of preventive means in order not to be dependent on their doctor.

Objective of De Einder is to provide moral support to people who are planning their final phase of life. This moral support is offered by consultants who guide people in clarifying their often ambivalent feelings and thoughts with regard to end-of-life decisions. In a personal meeting De Einder's consultants discuss with the person concerned the questions and possible doubts with respect to the choices that are being considered by him. Most often such conversations are centred around the most radical decision that a person can take: the decision to end his own life. Those who are faced with such a decision feel the need and deserve to submit their considerations – and their questions and doubts – to someone who is familiar with end-of-life decisions. Someone who has enough distance to avoid identification with the client but who is also empathic enough to understand his death wish. Someone whose most important concern is that the client takes a well-considered decision with regard to the question to be or not to be. Someone who can ensure that the person who has taken a well-considered decision to commit suicide, says goodbye to the world in harmony and intimacy with his social environment.

Sensitive issues that the consultant is paying attention to are questions such as if the person concerned is of sound mind, if he is competent to fully oversee the consequences of his intention to step out of life and if he is capable to implement himself all steps to end his life without bringing other people into danger. Furthermore, it must be sure that an applicant's wish to die is completely voluntarily, without there being any implicit or explicit pressure that others have exerted on him. In addition, an applicant must take into consideration the legitimate interests of others when deciding to step out of life. And finally, it must be plausible that self euthanasia is indeed the only alternative that remains for the applicant.

The consultant fulfils the role of discussion partner in the deepening of the issues discussed above and not the role of someone who makes demands. If the person seeking assistance does indeed consistently hold on to his opinion that life has little or nothing positive to offer and is mainly suffering, the consultant will inform the person concerned of how to achieve a peaceful and dignified death.

For each observer, the following must be an eye-opener: the science of how to obtain access to reliable euthanatics takes away so much fear and tension from the person concerned and creates such a great reassurance that even with ease the decision is taken to continue living. Speaking about the death wish gives such a great relief, and having the relevant information offers people such a high level of security, that people often derive the strength to take up therapy again. It is the tension of 'not being able to talk about' – often out of fear of engaging the crisis service or anxiety for the judgmental opinion of relatives and third parties – which can lead to obsession with the death wish and make this whish overpowering.

Jacobsen: In consideration of the upcoming battlegrounds, so to speak, what will be the next areas of activism in the next decade, for Foundation The Einder?

De Bontridder: During the time that De Einder was founded and many years later, little was known about human suicidal methods and drugs. The Einder had to invent the wheel here. "How to prevent potential suicides from using horrendous means and methods for themselves and their environment?" was a question in a field that nobody had any experience with.

Around the turn of the millennium information about humane suicides and methods were described in the so-called Scottish book that in the Netherlands was only clandestine available. This WOZZ booklet was published in 2003 by the Scientific Research Foundation for Careful Suicide (WOZZ). In 2006, The Peaceful Pill Handbook by Philip Nitschke and Fiona Stewart appeared and in 2010 the first edition of the book 'Uitweg' by Boudewijn Chabot and Stella Braam was published. These last two books contain a wealth of information with respect to the question of how to end your life in a humane way.

With the arrival of Uitweg and the later editions of The Peaceful Pill Handbook, in which addresses were included to order the desired euthanatics, the focus of De Einder has shifted. There is now more attention for the question on whether the existing euthanasia law should not be extended.

The current euthanasia law is suitable for what it is meant for: enabling the physician to honour a request for euthanasia by a patient suffering from a medical disease. The current law enables doctor's euthanasia.

De Einder is of the opinion that there should also be a law that makes a careful suicide possible for a person who suffers existentially. Think of the 'completed life 'of elderly who are not sick but who 'suffer from life'. According to De Einder, someone who suffers from life must be able to end his life with the help of euthanatics made accessible by the government and without being dependent on the personal moral values of a doctor.

About such a second law it is said that it would form a bomb under the current euthanasia law. My preliminary judgment is that this does not have to be the case:

It is self-evident that strict requirements are imposed on doctor's euthanasia where a person requests someone else, i.e. the doctor, to end his life. But self-euthanasia where a person takes his own life by means of a euthanatic which he can — with or without the aid of intimates or end-of-life counselors — request from a government agency that only performs a marginal test on formal requirements (such as for example if the wish to die is not born under oppression of others), does not have to meet the strict requirements posed to doctor's euthanasia.

Jacobsen: What are the more local issues? Of these local issues, what ones link to the more international problems for the global community or organizations linked with FoundationThe Einder?

De Bontridder: Local issues are not at stake. At stake our universal values as the right to live and to right to die when life is unbearable.

Jacobsen: How does Foundation The Einder provide a solid basis upon which to change the legal conditions and sociocultural conversation around right to die issues?

De Bontridder: My answer would be too legal and too technical, could we skip this question?

Jacobsen: How is the Nederlands more progressive on euthanasia issues than other nations? How does the social health of the nation improve with these progressive measures taken by Nederlands? How can other countries learn from its example?

De Bontridder: May I reformulate this question? Would an organization like De Einder be helpful in other countries? Could other countries benefit from an organization that dedicates itself to turning the number of cruel suicides into suicides that can carry the predicate 'carefully'?

An organization like De Einder does not exist in any other country than the Netherlands. The impression exists that self-euthanasia, 'the careful suicide', is still a subject that is taboo in most other countries.

Could it be the case that there occur more cruel suicides in these countries while in the Netherlands more 'careful suicides' take place?

There is no scientific research with respect to this question, but if such research comes I guess it could lead to interesting conclusions.

Jacobsen: How can people become involved with donation of time, addition of membership, links to professional and personal networks, giving monetarily, and so on?

De Bontridder: I am afraid we cannot be of much help for Canadian people seeking for end of life assistance. And we neither can offer them possibilities to get more involved in our organization.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts based on the conversation today?

De Bontridder: No particular thoughts or feelings, thank you for considering me for this interview.

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

Ask an Abortion Doula 1 – Abortion Doula: A Canadian Option

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 6, 2019

Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson is an abortion doula and Ph.D. student in religious studies at the University of Alberta. She is the author of the Humanist Ceremonies Handbook (Humanist

Press, 2018) and the upcoming The Companion: An Abortion Doula Handbook. You can visit her at her website www.electriceelpond.com.

Here we talk about abortion doulas and abortion doula training in Edmonton.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You're the only qualified abortion doula and abortion doula trainer through the Abortion Doula Training Program in Edmonton. In other words, you're a one-woman enterprise.

I wanted to have this information available to the general public with this educational series. To start, for those who may not know, what is the main service of the Abortion Doula Training Program (Edmonton)?

Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson: Well, to begin with, I don't actually have any name for my training program. I think Joyce over at the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (which you should totally check out) just gave me that as a heading! I've been working on my own until recently and therefore didn't really give myself any kind of name. But yes, I do train people to become doulas so, in a sense, I run a training program. And my second book, which I'm working on now, will be something of a handbook for people who are interested in becoming an abortion doula.

But to answer your question, the main service I offer is...being an abortion doula! That means that I do everything from answering questions in person, on the phone, online, etc., about the different abortion procedures and walk people through getting appointments, filling out paperwork, etc. I also go with them to the clinic and even into the procedure itself if they want me there. Ultimately, a doula is an advocate. Many people accessing abortion care don't have anyone to advocate for them or educate them ahead of time. They usually go through the process alone and with no idea what's going to happen. At worst, they've run into anti-abortion pregnancy care centers which have filled their heads with all kinds of nonsense and doom. What I hope to do is put people at ease, educate them fully about their options and rights, and then help them navigate the process medically and emotionally.

Jacobsen: What is the amount of training required to become an abortion doula?

Reinhardt-Simpson: This is something that varies wildly. Legally, there are absolutely no requirements which is both awesome and kind of not great. Abortion doula work began as a very grassroots feminist concept of accompaniment based on relationship and so not having strict and impersonal official licensing bodies can be good. However, it does mean that anyone can set up as an abortion doula which, obviously, is not always good. I'm trying to find some middle ground by training doulas myself while also allowing for a high degree of flexibility. My concern is that I want to make sure that potential doulas are empathic and "other-focused". It doesn't help that many people are attracted to this work who see it as simply another form of visible activism. I want people to understand that we're working with actual human beings in complex situations and with complex feelings.

Most interested people do tend to seek out training programs. I got started in this quite early on in the movement so I got somewhat grandmothered into this work before there were many official training programs but most people today would probably do something more formal. Some clinics have training and then use the doulas in-house. I'm an independent doula myself so I'm not tied to any one clinic which gives me some flexibility.

Jacobsen: For those who have an interest in training to become an abortion doula in the province of Alberta, what are your recommended steps for them?

Reinhardt-Simpson: I would ask them to contact me by email at areinhardtsimpson@gmail.com. We'd have a nice, long chat and, if they seem suited to the work, I'd have them shadow me a bit to see what it's like and then, when ready, set them up with a few of their own patients. Part of the training does involve a background check.

Jacobsen: What are the professional ethics for working with patients as an abortion doula in Canada (or elsewhere)?

Reinhardt-Simpson: As I mentioned before, there are no legal or governing bodies that oversee abortion doula work so there is no official set of professional ethics. That said, the movement STRONGLY emphasises patient confidentiality and professionalism. That last one might mean various things to various people but in the training I offer it means that you should be confident that the information you are providing is true, accurate, and easily accessible to your patient. I provide each trainee with a list of resources that should help them to track down info when needed. It's also very important to me that trainees understand that though they may love this work, it is never about them. The patient should always be the focus of all our efforts. Therefore, if you're a very loud and proud activist – that's awesome and we need that -but this work may not give you the buzz that you're used to as we try to keep the patient front and center.

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

Interview with Kelly – Brights Community Clusters (BCCs) Coordinator, The Brights' Net

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 2, 2019 Kelly is the Community Clusters (BBCs) Coordinator of The Brights Net. Here we talk about her life, views, and work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was early life like for you, e.g., geography, culture, language, religion or lack thereof, education, and family structure and dynamics?

Kelly: I was born and raised in Sacramento, CA., the first child of three. My parents, as adults, immigrated from Greece to the United States. We had a rather traditional Greek home, whereby, the language, foods, art, music, customs, faith, and friends, were predominately Greek.

I'd like to point out that as with many people who immigrate to a foreign land, it is only natural to seek out people, community, interests, etc., which are similar to your own.

It's a matter of social survival, I suppose. In our case, the Greek community, at that time, was centered around the only Greek Orthodox Church in the area.

This is where we met other Greeks who became part of our "family". I can't begin to tell you how many "Aunts and Uncles" I have. Not biological, of course, but through the "extended" family, which came about through the relationships formed in the Greek community.

As a child, I didn't feel "different" about my family being from Europe, as most of my friends had the same experiences. I suppose the only time I did feel different, was when I was surrounded by people who did not have a "direct" link to their heritage.

Jacobsen: What levels of formal education have been part of life for you? How have you informally self-educated?

Kelly: As for my formal education, even though I was brought up Greek Orthodox, I attended Catholic schools for the majority of my life. I even attended an all girl's Catholic high school, in Sacramento, considered at the time, to offer a higher standard of education.

(Little did I know, it was an environment which encouraged mind control, submission and intellectual deficiency.) From there, I went on to earn my Bachelor's degree in Psychology.

To this day, I have little, if any fondness, of my experiences attending Catholic schools. In particular, I recall the sinister weapon of "control and obedience" – Physical, as well as mental.

Upon reflection, everything was deemed sinful/destructive – Especially, knowledge. As an individual, you were always set up for failure. Even the most innocent and natural of thoughts/ideas, was considered to be shameful and abhorrent.

It would have been bad enough to teach and threaten adults with these preposterous ideas/views, but to do this to children is unforgiveable, in my opinion.

That said, I do, however, consider myself one of the lucky ones. Albeit later in life, I was introduced to the concept of the "naturalistic" worldview. I found this outlook refreshing, as well as inviting.

For once, I was encouraged to be "curious", something I NEVER experienced in Catholic schools or the Greek Orthodox Church. Suddenly, I could ask questions, read, and learn, without having anyone of self-appointed authority prohibiting me.

Once I learned that living without the supernatural was a viable option, I felt an extraordinary sensation of freedom. I found myself discussing and sharing ideas, with others, topics of immense interest.

This may sound trivial to some, but until that time, I accepted the notion of not questioning certain ideas. In fact, the thing that I have found most difficult to forgive concerning supernatural indoctrination, is that it literally "robbed" me of knowledge and curiosity. I was told "what" to think, rather than "how" to think.

Jacobsen: Like the Brights Community Clusters (BCCs) Coordinator, what tasks and responsibilities come with the position?

Kelly: Brights Community Clusters (BBC's) are active groups of Brights throughout the world. People who register as "Brights" can meet other Brights in their communities. Last count, I believe there are roughly 130,000 registered Brights.

In fact, one of the most successful BCC's is the Russian Brights. They have an online community which you can view at the following link: https://brights-russia.org/ Currently, I've been more active in the distribution of the evolution poster, "Earth and Life: changes over time".

Thanks to our extremely generous donors, we are able to send high school science educators (for free), a resource tool, vital to the teaching of evolution and "sound science". To date, we have sent out several hundred posters to high school instructors across the globe.

Jacobsen: As the Brights emphasize the lack of any supernaturalism in the universe, how does this differ from some more standard non-religious viewpoints?

Kelly: I think there is a great deal of confusion concerning the term Bright. Let me clarify: The term "Bright" is a noun, not an adjective. The actual term, "Bright" comes from the Enlightenment period of history.

In 2003, cofounders Dr. Futrell and Dr. Geisert, decided to begin and promote The Brights' Net. As a registered Bright, one identifies as an individual who lives their life without "ALL" supernatural – not just god.

Many individuals have confused the term as another way of defining yourself as an atheist. Atheism only describes one's view about god. Being an atheist says nothing about one's notions concerning other supernatural: Psychics, astrology, superstitions, numerology, spirits, etc.

I have met several individuals who will openly dismiss the notion of god, only to admit that they believe in other supernatural phenomena/entities. As a Bright, one is identifying themselves to be free of any and all supernatural.

Jacobsen: With a focus on individuals, how does the Brights movement differ from others in terms of the non-supernaturalist movements with individualism?

Kelly: Our focus is not on religion or god. We have no dogma. Individuals are encouraged to act within their own spheres of influence. We intend to work to grow a constituency of Brights able to exercise social and political influence in a constructive fashion.

The Brights movement is not by design, an anti-religious force in society. The overall aim is civic fairness for all, which necessitates there being a place in politics and society for persons who hold a naturalistic outlook.

Jacobsen: Why does naturalism form a foundational basis of the Brights movement? What does this mean in practical terms for the interpretation of events presented to members?

Kelly: The Brights movement offers a different narrative. We aim to have people accept us as "full" participants in civil society.

Unfortunately, in many cultures, when one is identified as a person without supernatural beliefs, they are automatically perceived in a negative light – We want to change that perception.

Jacobsen: What are the community clusters and meetups? What are some examples of the happenings in these provisions for the Brights community?

Kelly: Community clusters and Meetups allow for fellow Brights to meet one another in their communities. Each group meets on their own volition, and they decide what they'd like to do, discuss, etc.

You can find out more by going to our website, <u>www.the-brights.net</u> and click on the "Community" tab. If your area does not have a BCC, you can always start one on your own.

Jacobsen: Who have been the more integral members, writers, and thinkers of the Brights international movement? Can you recommend any books by them?

Kelly: We have several well known Brights, who we refer to as "Enthusiastic Brights". You can view them on our website under the "People" tab.

Some included are Daniel Dennett, Susan Blackmore, Richard Dawkins and Leo Igwe. Many have written books and are on the speaking/lecture circuit. As for reading material, I highly recommend "The God Delusion", by Dr. Dawkins.

That particular book changed my life, for the better, might I add! I'm also rather fond of Dr. Dennett's, "Breaking the Spell", as it is extremely well done and certainly thought provoking. These individuals are Brights because they registered their approval with the stated aims of the movement.

Jacobsen: How can people become involved through the donation of time, the addition of membership, links to professional and personal networks, giving monetarily, exposure in interviews or writing articles, and so on?

Kelly: Thought you'd never ask. First and foremost, go to our website, <u>www.the-brights.net</u> and register as a Bright – It's free. Next, get involved in your community and tell people you are a Bright.

I have found that through discussion and visibility, people become more aware of our constituency and inevitably, this is how we grow. You'd be surprised as to how many people have the same views concerning the supernatural.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts based on the conversation today?

Kelly: I think it's important for individuals to realize just how vital it is to have a voice in the promotion of a naturalistic worldview. I hope that your readers will visit our website, <u>www.thebrights.net</u> and decide as to whether they identify as a Bright.

As participants in the movement, we strive to be accepted as full participants in society. With openness and visibility, we can strive to change the narrative!

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

Ask Joyce 2 – Individual Consent and National Consensus

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 7, 2019

Joyce Arthur is the Founder and Executive Director of the <u>Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada</u>. She has been an abortion rights and pro-choice activist since 1998. Arthur worked for 10 years running the <u>Pro-Choice Action Network</u>. In addition to these accomplishments,

she founded <u>FIRST</u> or the first national feminist group advocating for the rights of sex workers and the decriminalization of prostitution in Canada. We decided to start an educational series on reproductive rights in its various facets. Here we talk about Ontario.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: With the repeal of the sexual education curriculum in Ontario, what are the central concerns about this move by Premier Doug Ford in terms of consent?

Joyce Arthur: Students live in a very different world today, compared to 1998 when Ontario's previous sex-ed curriculum was implemented. Everyone uses the Internet, with its easy-to-access porn, and its cyberbullying, including online sexual harassment of women and girls. That makes teaching the concept of consent crucial for safety reasons and to reduce abuse. Consent means that each person needs to ensure their partner has actively agreed to any sexual act. Consent means a clear, even enthusiastic yes – not reluctance, uncertainty, or silence. As <u>sexual health</u> <u>educator</u> Kristin Rushowy said, "While 'no means no' was the mantra for years when talking about sexual consent, it's now 'yes means yes'." Further, once consent is given, it can be retracted at any time including during sex; it is never ongoing.

It's been social conservatives and anti-choice and religious groups driving the opposition to the former Liberal government's 2015 sex-ed curriculum, so let's compare this modern concept of consent to the traditional view on sexuality. The idea of consent is actually antithetical to right-wing religious beliefs. Sex should be only for married couples (a man and a woman born that way, to be clear) and the main purpose is procreation, not pleasure. It wasn't that long since marital rape was not a crime – because a wife was expected to give herself to her husband and meet his demands, and by marrying him she permanently consented to sex. We see the same dynamic at work when we confront the sexist assumption that a sex worker, just by virtue of selling sexual services, has thereby lost her right to say no and gives default consent to having any kind of sex with anyone at any time. From the right-wing point of view then, the whole idea of consent is highly questionable because it gives sexual autonomy to women and encourages sex for pleasure and casual sex outside marriage. They don't like "yes means yes" and want to go back to "no means no" because they are sexually repressive.

Interestingly, the Ontario government has backtracked somewhat after they got an earful from their public consultation, and they plan to put consent back into the curriculum. We'll have to wait and see how much effort they put into that. But I doubt we'll see them use the word "enthusiastic" when it comes to sexual consent.

Jacobsen: Let's make this comparative and practical, and concrete: what was sexual education and public life like before the explicit introduction and implicit expectation of, more, consent-based sexual education and sexual activity? How did things change in the 4-5 years with the introduction of the modernized sexual education curriculum in Ontario, and elsewhere, along the same lines of education and activity?

Arthur: Sex education has always been a controversial topic and was not mandated in Ontario schools until 1987, in response to the AIDS crisis. Indeed, sex-ed has always tended to be scare-mongering – avoid sex if you don't want to get pregnant or an STI. And best to wait until you're married, of course. It's still mostly that way, although it's improved compared to early sex-ed in the 1960's and 1970's – if you got any at all back then, it was about teaching body parts and menstruation. It's really a shame that the new Ontario government rescinded the new sex-ed program because it represented the most progressive and comprehensive one in Canada. Most provinces fall far short of teaching progressive sex-ed; they still emphasize abstinence and

avoiding STIs. You can read a 2017 summary of the sex-ed policies/programmes of each province and territory here: http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/postionpapers/39-Sex-Education-in-Canada.pdf

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

Interview with Nik J. Gray – Co-Founder, Society of ExMuslims Australia

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 8, 2019

Nik J. Gray is the Co-Founder of the Society of ExMuslims Australia. Here we talk about her life, views, and work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was early life like for you, e.g., geography, culture, language, religion or lack thereof, education, and family structure and dynamics?

Nik J Gray, Co-Founder of SEMA: My family is a bit different from most Muslims as I am the child of a convert. My family are very religious Islamically and I grew up along the eastern coast of Australia as well as temporarily living in Somalia.

I didn't have much of an education growing up as my family didn't believe that an Australian/Western Education was acceptable instead was homeschooled from a religious perspective. I do not have much to do with my family as they can not accept my apostasy.

Jacobsen: What levels of formal education have been part of life for you? How have you informally self-educated?

Nik J Gray: I was not able to obtain my high school graduate until after I left home. I tried to study at university but due to the lack of support from government agencies, I was unable to continue to study and work.

After a few years, I obtained a few certificates in Business Management. Informally, I read anything and everything I can get my hands on.

Jacobsen: What are the central issues facing ex-Muslims in Australia?

Nik J Gray: A distinct lack of understanding and support from not just general population but government agencies. I left home in 2011 and many ExMuslims are still facing the same issues that affected me. We are constantly silenced when we try to speak up on any issue that may affect us as being islamophobic or racist.

Jacobsen: Are there some issues ex-Muslim women face that ex-Muslim men do not, and vice versa? What are they?

Nik J Gray: As an ExMuslim woman I definitely had issues adjusting to a world where men and women mixed. I was timid, shy and didn't know how to do anything such as catch a bus, find a job or pay bills.

I think this is an issue that can affect perhaps ExMuslims of both genders however perhaps more women as we are often kept more isolated from the outside world versus our male counterparts.

As a woman I can not say much regarding the issues that exMuslim men face but they do have their own hurdles they must jump.

Jacobsen: What are important allies in the efforts to protect, provide asylum for, and give community to ex-Muslims in Australia?

Nik J Gray: Currently the only support ExMuslims in Australia seem to be receiving is from the Secular Party of Australia and Progressive Atheists. Beyond that most organisations seem to be silent, but that can also be a lack of awareness due to how secretive the ExMuslim community is in Australia.

Jacobsen: What writers and thinkers most accurately articulate the concerns of the ex-Muslim community?

Nik J Gray: I think that most ExMuslim activists on Twitter such as Yasmine Mohammed, Armin Navabi, and Ali Rizvi are all doing great work when it comes to the concerns of exMuslims.

Jacobsen: Moving into 2019, what the targeted objectives of "Society For ExMuslims Australia"?

Nik J Gray: Right now we are just aiming to be a face of ExMuslims in Australia with the hopes to be able to provide a network of support groups for ExMuslim Australia wide in the coming future.

Jacobsen: What are some of the heartwarming as well as tragic stories that you've encountered with ex-Muslims?

Nik J Gray: Every ExMuslim story I hear breaks my heart a little bit. It is a terrible thing that in the 21st century we have people fearing for their lives not just in Muslim countries.

For myself personally, the heartwarming stories I encounter are when people tell me that they finally feel free. Every ExMuslim story is a tragic tale that sometimes ends in joy, and sometimes in misery.

Jacobsen: How can people become involved through the donation of time, the addition of membership, links to professional and personal networks, giving monetarily, exposure in interviews or writing articles, and so on?

Nik J Gray: Society of ExMuslims Australia is still in its grassroots stage. We are all volunteers who are taking time out of lives to dedicate to the void that is missing in the ExMuslim community in Australia.

I have always said when asked what can other people do to support exMuslims and I respond with; Listen and Share our stories through whatever means you can.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts based on the conversation today?

Nik J Gray: I just hope that one day an organisation like SEMA won't have to exist because people can leave Islam without fearing losing their family or even their lives.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time.

Nik J Gray: Thank you.

Ask Annie Laurie 1 – Secular Women

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 8, 2019

Annie Laurie Gaylor is the Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) with Dan Barker. She has been part of the fight against the encroachment of religion on secular culture, and human and women's rights for decades. Here we talk about secular women.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Who are some secular women in history who made important, but almost unknown to the wider public, contributions to secularism in the United States?

Annie Laurie Gaylor: Francis Wright was lionized by the early suffragists of the 19th century, placed in the frontispiece of the first volume of "The History of Woman Suffrage," but is largely unremembered today.

She became the first woman to speak publicly to men and women in what were known as "promiscuous assemblies" from the podium in the United States, the first to speak publicly to advocate women's equality and certainly the first to question the utility of religion and denounce the power of the clergy.

She was a pioneering antislavery activist, social reformer, early advocate of free public schools and editor of the "Free Enquirer." She knew Jeremy Bentham, won praise from Thomas Jefferson and became the confidante of General Lafayette.

To the US press and clergy, she was vilified as "The Red Harlot of Infidelity," a "bold blamer and voluptuous preacher of licentiousness." She entreated believers to "turn their churches into halls of science."

Another path-blazer largely unknown today but in her day as well known as Gloria Steinem was Ernestine L. Rose, born in Poland, the daughter of an orthodox rabbi who successfully fought for her own property rights when he tried to marry her off at 16 to a much older man using her inheritance from her mother as a dowry.

She wound up in the United States in 1836, just in time to become a booster of the Married Woman's Property Act, introduced in the state of New York by a freethinking judge who had no support until Ernestine showed up. She went door to door asking women to sign a petition for their property rights and in five months' time had only garnered five signatures.

But she didn't give up, other women joined her, and in 1848, the first Married Woman's Property Act was passed in New York, a small step for New York women, but a large step for womankind.

She went on to visit 23 states seeding similar legislation, and also openly espousing atheism. She was much admired in freethought circles and spent most of her life seeking to help women and overcome religion.

Jacobsen: What books would you recommend on the subject of secular women? How have women simply been the backbone of religious communities and, potentially, secular ones too? But they have been denied core decision-making positions or prominent public intellectual status?

Gaylor: I edited the first anthology of women freethinkers, "Women Without Superstition: No Gods — No Masters, The Collected Writings of Women Freethinkers of the 19th and 20th Centuries," published by FFRF and available from FFRF.

It does need updating for the 21st century. I recommend Eleanor Flexner's "A Century of Struggle" (about the early feminist movement but including many secular activists), "From Housewife to Heretic" by Sonia Johnson and "Infidel" by Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Women have played a disproportionate role in the secular movement in part because we have the most to gain (and to lose) when religion controls government. Historically many women have started and led or are leading secular and freethought groups all around the world.

Since "Women Without Superstition" came out, Yuri Suhl has researched and written a new biography on Ernestine L. Rose, called "Ernestine L. Rose: Women's Rights Pioneer." Matilda Joslyn Gage is another overlooked early feminist pioneer, who comprised what was called the "triumvirate" of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

Together they edited the first volumes of the "History of Woman Suffrage" and she wrote the ground-breaking "Woman, Church & State" (still in print in 1893). A new bio out on her is "Born Criminal: Matilda Joslyn Gage, Radical Suffragist" by Angelica Shirley Carpenter.

Karen Garst has written or edited two books, "Woman v. Religion" and "Women Beyond Belief." Candace Gorham has written "The Ebony Exodus Project: Why Some Black Women Are Walking Out on Religion— and Others Should Too."

Jacobsen: How can the secular community continue to improve the representation and presentation of secular women to the public, and secular women of color?

Gaylor: Keep inviting them to speak at conferences and contribute writings to journals. The early American suffragists were typically embraced by the freethinking community. E.C. Stanton was a revered figure published in most of the major secular journals, for example.

This led Susan H. Wixon, a respected freethought writer in the late 19th century, to say that "Freethought has always been the best friend woman had" in a major speech.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation would not exist today were it not for the intersection of the interests of women with the proponents of secular government. My mother and I co-founded FFRF after my mother's work as an early abortion rights and contraceptive rights advocate (with me trailing around as a middle-schooler) in the late 1960s.

We both became aware that the only organized enemy of women's rights, particularly reproductive rights, was religion, and realized women could not be free unless government is free from religion.

Today surveys of our membership (now over 31,000) reveal that of all the other major social controversies, the support for abortion rights is uppermost. So while our membership is male-dominated (as is true for the secular movement in general), these members support the most controversial of women's rights. We continue to advocate for reproductive rights, along with LGBTQ rights, as an integral part of the movement.

So the short answer, in summary, for how secular groups can continue to attract women is for us to continue to advocate for the rights of women to be free from religious dogma in government.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Annie Laurie.

Ask SASS (Rick) 1 – Secular Marriages in South Africa with a Touch of Sass

Scott Douglas Jacobsen
April 9, 2019

This is an ongoing and new series devoted to the South African Secular Society (SASS) and South African secularism. The Past President, Jani Schoeman, and the Current President, Rick Raubenheimer, will be taking part in this series to illuminate these facets of South Africa culture to us. For the opening session, Rick joins us.

Here we talk about secular marriages in South Africa.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is happening with secular marriages in South Africa? How are you involved with some of it?

Rick Raubenheimer: Let us get the background first, the South African constitution adopted after apartheid provides that there shall be no discrimination on various grounds including religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc. It was then realized that the South African Marriage Act, as it stood then, only allowed marriage between a man and a woman.

The legislature decided that they should do something about that. Because of the opposition from the churches, they created a whole new act rather than amending the Marriage Act. This was called the Civil Union Act. It provides for a wider definition between any two consenting adults. Therefore, it allows for gay marriage as well.

It broadens the scope from simply being restricted to basically Christian and Jewish marriages. This was all very well. But there was a get out clause. The Department of Home Affairs, as we call it here, is responsible for things internal to South Africa. That is the agency of last resort, if you like, to get married.

It is basically getting married in the registry office. Any two people can go to the Department of Home Affairs, in theory, and can get married. It does not have to be done in a church or anywhere else. The only problem with this is the Home Affairs offices had a get out.

Under the Civil Union Act, they could opt out of giving same-sex marriages. The net result of this was in the more backward – let us say, more rural and religious, areas. It would be more difficult to find someone from the Department of Home Affairs who would marry them.

That loophole has now been closed by an amendment to the act. Home Affairs has two years in which to rectify the situation. In the meanwhile, last year, SASS, the South African Secular Society, had some requests from some of our members that they get appointed marriage officers by the Department of Home Affairs.

They cannot go to the Office of Home Affairs and say, "Appoint me as a marriage officer under the Civil Union Act." They must go through a 'religious organization.' Two people who want to become marriage officers approached SASS and said, "Will you become our 'religious organization'?"

We approached Home Affairs and said, "We would like to certify marriage officers under the Civil Union Act." Home Affairs made us jump through several hoops including twice getting us to provide a list of 250 members, which we did. Then, finally, Home Affairs certified us as an organization that can designate marriage officers.

Once we told Home Affairs who we want to get designated, they must study the Civil Union Act and pass with no less than 75%. Having done that, they can be certified as marriage officers. We set up a process to interview people to make sure that they are suitable and follow the guidelines of SASS and agree with our worldview, which includes the naturalistic worldview.

That they will have ceremonies free of supernatural elements and will marry same-sex and opposite-sex couples. We give their details to Home Affairs. Then after a time (not a quick process), Home Affairs sets up their exam at a suitable Home Affairs office. Then Home Affairs takes up to 2 months to mark it.

With any luck, it tells us that we have a designated marriage officer. So far, we have one. Three others have failed their exams (with 70% each, coincidentally). We await them rewriting their exams. We have another 14 or 16 people in various stages of getting interviewed, notification to Home Affairs, or who are writing their exams for the first time.

This has, in a sense, be a major good for us. Because we have people from all over the country who are interested in becoming marriage officers. A lot of them are gay. That is their reason. They want to provide that service in places where people could not otherwise get married for the next one and a half years, at least.

That is what has happened on the marriage officers side. It is very exciting. It has also increased our membership. Because, to stay on the right side of Home Affairs, marriage officers must be part of our 'congregation', hence be part of the paid membership. It is about 10 dollars per month (USD).

Also, the people who are married must be members of the 'congregation.' It is gradually growing our membership. It is an unintentional fashion, so we might as well make good of it. Many of our members are intending marriage officers.

Jacobsen: What would be the average number of ceremonies somebody would perform through SASS?

Raubenheimer: Our marriage officer who is in Cape Town who was certified in November has done 5. 1 foreign couple. 1 same-sex couple. 3 mixed couples. 1 was an interfaith couple.

Jacobsen: What is feedback from some of the public, whether in the news or who have had the privilege of having the ceremonies officiated in this way?

Raubenheimer: We do not have feedback from the couples. The public, mostly the atheist community, has been very supportive and said, "Wow, what a wonderful thing to happen." But I think they are a minority in a traditional country like South Africa.

I think they are providing a valuable service in the secular community and for people who would like to have a ceremony rather than just a plain, "I do," in the magistrate's office in Home Affairs – and one that is legally binding. We have put it out there that the people who we designate as marriage officers can provide other ceremonies like funerals – probably the next one – and things like baby namings, coming of age, and renewing of wedding vows.

On funerals, in South Africa, the legal parts are handled by undertakers. They take care of the bodies, dispose of them, or whatever is going to be done. A funeral ceremony can be done by anyone in the family or interested party. It does not require legal certification. But no one has shown a great deal of interest in it.

Jacobsen: Could the organization provide a nice bridge for the atheist and non-religious becoming more accepted but also couples of other worldviews using an intermediary for their interfaith weddings?

Raubenheimer: To a degree. We do ceremonies free of the supernatural. People can bring the ceremonial part of their faith without breaking our rules. I think this was the case with the interfaith couple. Someone from a Jewish background and somebody from a Catholic background.

In a Jewish ceremony, the couples stand under an awning. It is held with four poles and "pole bearers" to carry it. There will be variations. But typically, they will break a glass to symbolize in some perverse fashion that the marriage will not be broken the way the glass has been broken.

From the Catholic side, they had candles, which can be seen as symbols to people in one faith and another faith. They were, in a way, saying to the family that they were respecting them, but without invoking gods, angels, and demons, and so on.

Jacobsen: What do you see as some of the difficulties or the tensions for those who may be conducting these, as you expand into funerals and so on?

Raubenheimer: One of the interesting things that we have had has been from the theistic community. On the website, we explain the naturalistic worldview. We explain the concepts behind SASS and the naturalistic point of view, and the rejection of the supernatural. We ask if they agree with the SASS code of conduct – not doing marriages with the supernatural or with only heterosexuals.

They tick them. Then we ask them, "Why do you want to become a SASS marriage officer?" We get answers like, "I am spiritual but not religious. I do Reiki and touch healing and crystal healing, and x, y, and z. So, I want to do marriages with all these things."

Even more interesting, we get people who say, "I am a pastor in x, y, or z evangelical congregation. I want to be a marriage officer in the congregation." They would have to prove they are a legitimate organization and show they have a specific amount of membership and so on.

We simply tell them to apply to Home Affairs directly. Expanding into other areas, we probably have not foreseen everything yet. Part of this would be trying to bring the supernatural in through the back door. Some parts of families being unhappy that some gods are not invoked.

What was said with the interfaith marriage was the tolerance of the different families, the right noises were being made. People seemed happy and tolerant and not finding a problem with it. Often, you would expect – particularly with interfaith things – the families to become acclimatized to the idea that "we need to tolerate another religion on the account that this is what our son or daughter is marrying into. We will put up with this, at least."

If the opposing god –shall we say– is not invoked, then this becomes a relief.

Jacobsen: Do more men inquire or more women inquire about these forms of weddings – to give a wedding or to be provided a wedding?

Raubenheimer: Interestingly enough, we have not had that many directly. I will explain why. Before the marriage project was ongoing, we had a page on our website with the officers willing to perform secular weddings. This somewhat annoys Home Affairs. But they are not doing much about it.

All of these marriage officers have come through a particular religion or group; thus, marrying "outside their congregation", it is strictly speaking against the rules. Home Affairs is against it. But there is nothing that they do about it.

Marriage planners tend to inquire about secular weddings. They go there and look up a wedding officer in their area and then ask them. We simply do not have blanket coverage over the country, yet. We work with Cape Town mainly. We cannot provide things throughout the country entirely. We should be able to do this within the next year.

In the meantime, people would approach the marriage officer. So, I cannot answer the question about the distribution of people inquiring.

Jacobsen: What would it take in terms of the advertising and the marketing campaign to expand the reach of secular weddings in South Africa?

Raubenheimer: It would require a certain amount of money as our income is roughly 10USD per month from 20-25 members. The first thing to do would be to use social media or atheist groups to drive up the paid membership, perhaps offer some more benefits like a t-shirt and knowledge that they will be supporting secularism in South Africa.

We could think about paid advertising on social media and so on. At the moment, it is mostly word of mouth and Facebook atheist groups and then trying to get out that way.

Jacobsen: What are other non-secular organizations providing in terms of marriages that could be replicated?

Raubenheimer: We are, in a sense, nationwide pioneers. There is an organization in Cape Town called the Free Society Institute. They preceded us in terms of certifying their director and one other as marriage officers. They were not of great assistance to us in doing the job.

Apart from that, we are being strictly secular, and so being pretty much the pioneers. There are some, shall we say, liberal churches who have put themselves forward as churches. They do not require strict adherence to the faith. They would, in essence, do a secular wedding, as one of the ones listed on our website.

Jacobsen: What are some common vows given at a secular wedding?

Raubenheimer: Again, it is a bit premature to ask me that. We do ask our proposed wedding officers for sample ceremonies that they would give and they would present it to us during the interview. We give them feedback on it.

There is a formula used by Home Affairs. Essentially, the couple says that there is no impediment to their getting married. There is a formula that the marriage officers then put to them. They then say, "I do," on either side. Then the marriage officer announces them, husband and wife.

But other than that, it is pretty much free form.

Jacobsen: Do you expect a backlash from fundamentalist religious groups who see you as servants of some dark power in some way?

Raubenheimer: We have not seen that yet. It is entirely possible, particularly in rural areas. I think, generally speaking, secularism has been so far below the radar and a minority thing. It is

going to take a while before it gets noticed. Unless, we were to conduct an actual atheist billboard campaign.

It [Laughing] really is not our style. We have been more low key and conciliatory. We have been more accommodating rather than in-your-face antitheists. We did lose some members at the beginning when we were settling on our values because of this.

It seems the best way to handle this in South Africa rather than Madalyn Murray O'Hair atheism. It is better to go about things softly. Anti-theists can do things on their own, but not under the SASS banner.

Jacobsen: What is the importance of secular wedding officiants in order to advance secular values in South Africa?

Raubenheimer: I would say it is a key feature because multiple people have said, having discovered that we are getting secular marriage officers organized, "I wish I had this when I got married." People either had to go to what you would call a magistrate or get somebody who said that they would do a secular wedding and then got carried away based on habit halfway through by throwing god into the mix.

Several people have had unpleasant experiences with that. I think it is key, as we, in fact, say on our website; that we bring in the secular values of the South African constitution. That there will be no discrimination on the basis of religion and actually providing people in their service.

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

Raubenheimer: Thank you, Scott.

Interview with Courtney of "The Free Speech Podcast"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 9, 2019

Courtney is the Host of "The Free Speech Podcast." Here we talk about her life, work on the podcast, and views.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Just to give an idea to the audience here, what is some relevant background from early life into the present?

Courtney: I grew up in the United States, more specifically in the South. My upbringing was in a seemingly nonreligious household, that had its fair share of dysfunction. In high school, I tried on Christianity and thought that I agreed with its tenets, but within two years' time, I left it behind. I had too many questions and the answers I was provided, if I was given any, weren't satisfying. I have always been known to ask deep questions, from a young age, up into the present. Oftentimes, I find that by asking questions that are interesting to me, questions that are deemed taboo, off-limits, or controversial, the responses and in turn the relationships that I build are full of depth, complexity, passion, and thought. That isn't to say that I haven't gotten my fair share of hate, disconnect, or loss of relationships, but I find that the meaningful conversations trump the shallowness of the lost relations.

Jacobsen: What differentiates the American-specific orientation towards freedom of speech and the more internationalist frame of freedom of expression to you?

Courtney: The vast coverage of freedom of expression is unique to the United States. In my opinion, it is this set of rights that distinguishes us from the rest of the world. Freedom of speech is the epitome of American values. On an international scale, a lot of countries seek more control over their people in this regard.

Jacobsen: Why found The Free Speech Podcast?

Courtney: The Free Speech Podcast is founded on the premise that ideas are not sacred, they should be questioned and discussed at length, but with tact, civility, and reason. The core elements that underpin The Free Speech Podcast are Enlightenment values that I feel are necessary for civil discourse, progress as an American society as well as globally. The Free Speech Podcast is a safe place for unsafe ideas, a place to express your opinion without fear of aggression, ad hominem attacks, or belittlement. I feel as though this is missing from the public discourse found on social media sites where it's easy to lay behind a computer screen without real consequences for our comments. People are apt to typing messages that more than likely wouldn't be stated if people were face to face. So, I want a place that people come to see, engage, and participate with reasonable discussion about difficult topics that sometimes, maybe even most of the time, don't have answers.

Jacobsen: "The Art of Debate and How it Can Help Relationships and Anxiety" was the most recent episode or recording prior to the interview. Why this topic?

Courtney: Debate is often misconstrued or is tossed around with a negative connotation to the word. People shy away from it for fear of rejection, ostracism for the wrong idea, and the confrontation assumed to come with it. I want to highlight how this is a horrible misconception of debate, and though it can be portrayed as a winner/loser style, it has the potential to enhance our relationships and our mental health. Debating ideas gives courage, confidence, and the skills to manipulate words into meaningful sentences and arguments to attempt to articulate a perspective or point, using the evidence gathered through research.

Jacobsen: How can debate help with anxiety and relationships?

Courtney: In honest debates, people change their minds in the presence of good evidence. This can be powerful to the everyday person who may struggle with communicating their wants or needs, how they feel, why they feel the way that they do, and how to reconcile counter arguments in a productive, civil, and meaningful manner. Debating, at its core, is centered on impeccable communication skills. Communication skills are proven to be crucial and critical to successful relationships, whether that's spousal, friendship, parent/child, etc.

Debate, in the case portrayed in the most recent episode, gave Penny the courage, skills, and platform to face her anxiety head-on. I have found that facing our fears, within boundaries, we are able to push ourselves beyond the limits we set for ourselves. We have the ability to curtail negative emotions and behaviors by growing beyond our superficial limits that we set.

Jacobsen: If we're looking at the epithets floating within mostly the online sphere, we can observe the two major ones with two distinct streams of thought. One is "Social Justice Warrior" or SJW. Another is "Free Speech Warrior" or FSW as a logical complement to the first. Epithet-ism pervades modern discourse on all or most sides. Why?

Courtney: Humans have evolved to find patterns within people, our environment and ourselves. Boiling down political positions into these epithets are a natural way to make sense of our world. When ideas become too complex, people boil them down to bite-sized pieces that are easier to digest. Unfortunately, this can be a detriment to understanding others who differ from us. We put people into boxes based on a political perspective, ideology, race, religion, etc to make sense of them, instead of engaging with them personally. At our evolutionary roots, this goes back to our tribalism nature, our ability to identify threats quickly, and to know who or what we can trust.

Jacobsen: How can an emphasis on freedom of speech, in particular, and freedom of expression, in general, in a podcast re-invigorate a core internationalist value?

Courtney: I believe wholeheartedly that the most effective way to have progress, in any sense of the word, is to have a marketplace of ideas. Competition for ideas will drown out the ones that don't hold up against scrutiny, and the most logical and sound will prevail. So, in order to keep this value alive, we must celebrate it, entertain it, engage with it, and create it. Freedom of speech (thought) is the most precious right we have in keeping our autonomy.

The podcast is an homage as much as it is a creative endeavour to uphold this core right.

Jacobsen: What topics seem more out of bounds for the more left-oriented folks? What subject matter seems more off-grounds for the more right-shifted people?

Courtney: From the left-oriented folks, I have found that conversations on topics such as criticism of Islam, nationalism/patriotism, gun rights and border security are emotionally charged and oftentimes extreme.

Right-oriented folks tend to shy away from conversations concerning Universal Healthcare and Income, higher education (specifically free education), secularism, and lack an openness on the topic of abortion.

Jacobsen: Should we remove or keep the epithet-ism ongoing at the moment? In either case, why does this labelling become a widespread default in a Computer Age among individuals from all backgrounds?

Courtney: To circle back to the previous question on the pervasiveness of epithet-ism, we can learn how to shy away from these contrived boxes we use to simplify the world, but our nature based on our evolution will mostly side with compartmentalization. This is both a downfall and an asset.

We naturally put people into boxes, seek to hear news that we agree with, and engage with others who are like-minded. We're also engaging in the Computer Age on social media, where the companies are begging for our attention. They are constructing platforms that feed us the news in ways that we want to hear it, maybe even what news we are exposed to, encourage the creation of groups and hashtags to further a particular topic or people, and show us ads that are designed to specifically target us. This can be an incredibly strong force acting against diversity of ideas, organic gathering of news and research, and seeing people and organizations that differ from us.

Jacobsen: Any recommended authors or podcasts?

Courtney: Some of my favorite authors include Peter Boghossian, Carl Sagan, Steven Pinker, Robert Sapolsky, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, Paul Bloom, Yuval Noah Harari, Jonathan Haidt, and J. K. Rowling,

I suggest the Joe Rogan Experience show, Unregistered Podcast with Thaddeus Russell, Sam Harris' Making Sense, and Rubin Report with Dave Rubin.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Courtney: I want to make it clear that the most reasonable, deep, and meaningful interactions happens between humble, intellectually honest people who are at ease with being proven wrong, learning, and growing.

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

Interview with John Seager – President, Population Connection

Scott Douglas Jacobsen
April 10, 2019

John Seager is the President of Population Connection. Here we talk about his life, work, and views.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: To provide a brief background, anything personal or familial not reachable through a Google search about you? Perhaps, something relevant to the prochoice advocacy and work now.

John Seager: I've been with Population Connection (formerly known as Zero Population Growth) for 23 years.

I came from a progressive political and legislative background having worked briefly for the US Environmental Protection Agency and having served as Chief of Staff for a member of the US House of Representatives who worked on behalf of international family planning as well as the rights of women to choose abortion.

Jacobsen: As the President of Population Connection, what tasks and responsibilities come with the position?

Seager: In addition to the usual management responsibilities, I've delivered hundreds of lectures and other presentations on 84 college campuses and in many other venues. I'd welcome invitations from our Canadian friends. I've spoken at many atheist, agnostic, and secular humanist events.

Jacobsen: Population is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Since the organization works from the United States, since 1968, what have been major victories in its work for global access to family planning and reproductive health care?

Seager: Since our founding, we've seen ups and downs and major shifts. The good news includes the fact that there are now nearly 100 nations around the world, including the US and Canada, that are at or below "replacement rate" in terms of family size, as compared with about four such nations at the time of our founding.

We don't by any means claim direct credit for this progress, but we've been a consistently strong voice on behalf of voluntary family planning.

One of the unfortunate developments has been the rise here in the US of strident opposition to sexual and reproductive rights and health. It is a major battleground.

Jacobsen: Who have been the central oppositions to the work of Population Connection for family planning and reproductive health care? What are their tactics? How can we combat them?

Seager: The evangelical Religious Right in the US is the locus of opposition. They certainly oppose the right of women to access abortion, but also stand in the way of virtually every effort to maintain and expand fact-based sex education and reproductive health services.

They are single-minded, well-funded, and politically savvy with a strong ally occupying the White House. The situation with regarding to Catholicism is more complex.

While the hierarchy follows Vatican dictates in opposing abortion and modern contraception, practicing Catholics in the US actually have smaller families than Protestants.

Our side needs to assert the inalienable right of every person to a clear zone of privacy. This includes freedom of – and from – religion and the freedom to decide if, when, and how many children to bear.

The latter depends on people having unfettered access to sound information and affordable services including contraception and abortion. Elections matter.

We must outwork the opposition. And we must be relentlessly upbeat and optimistic, if we're to prevail.

Jacobsen: What are some common misunderstandings by the public about family planning and reproductive health care? What truths dispel those misunderstandings?

Seager: What's key here is that every woman everywhere needs to have the education, information, and access to the full array of reproductive health services.

It must always be focused on her own personal needs and circumstances as she views them. Rights are rights. There is room for compromise on many issues, but not when it comes to individual rights.

Jacobsen: Since the Global Gag Rule took effect, what has been the impact on the international population? How has this gag affected the efforts of the international prochoice community in the advancement of women's reproductive rights?

Seager: The Global Gag Rule imposed by President Trump is causing much pain and hardship since health providers in some of the poorest places on earth have lost funding since they cannot in good conscience agree to be silenced by this edict.

It is directly responsible for increases in unplanned pregnancies, unplanned births, and abortions (mostly unsafe) due to unplanned pregnancies.

It will result in the deaths of many women and infant children. It's a mean, miserable act. The US Congress can and must take this power away from the President.

Jacobsen: With its 50-year anniversary passing, what will be its efforts and plans for the future?

Seager: While families have gotten smaller in many places around the world due to increased access to reproductive health services, we're still adding about one billion people to our overcrowded, overheated planet every dozen years.

We need increased investment in family planning, and we need to ensure that the next generation is aware of the population connection to other critical global issues.

Jacobsen: Any recommended authors or speakers?

Seager: Robert Engelman's book, <u>More</u>, is excellent as is Alan Weisman's <u>Countdown</u>. For a rebuttal of the false notion that we need more people to have a healthy economy, our book, <u>The</u> Good Crisis, is available as a free download.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Seager: We need to trust, support, and empower women everywhere so they can achieve full reproductive autonomy.

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

	56
Interview with Administrator of "Gay Ex Muslim" Scott Douglas Jacobsen	
April 11, 2019	

Here we talk with the Administrator of "Gay Ex Muslim."

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are the more well-known difficulties of homosexuals within some Islamic communities and countries?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": Check out our post in relation to that: https://www.facebook.com/341957429901417/posts/407158043381355?sfns=mo

Telling Your Pakistani Mom That You're Gay | Ackley Bridge

Nas is considering the arranged marriage. But the pressure of it all leads Nas to break down to her mum and confess that she is gay. Watch the episode on All...

youtube.com

Jacobsen: What are some of the lesser-known aspects of prejudice and difficulties of the homosexual community in some Islamic communities and countries?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": You are subject to disownment, abuse by family members, lack of job opportunities, etc.

Jacobsen: What Islamic communities and countries have more acceptance of the homosexual communities within them?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": As per as we know, none.

Jacobsen: How are ex-Muslims, typically, treated around the world?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": Maryam Namazie describes them as minorities within minorities. Ex-Muslims are silenced, threatened, at worst killed.

Jacobsen: As minorities within minorities, obviously, Muslims are disliked in some Western nations. However, within these groupings, some Muslim communities show prejudice to ex-Muslims and governments outright ignore ex-Muslims, in spite of the large number of groups and councils. In a way, ex-Muslims undergo, probably, more pain and suffering and isolation than others, as minorities within minorities. Is this exacerbated within the homosexual ex-Muslim communities?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": We have published about this subject: https://www.facebook.com/341957429901417/posts/406967216733771?sfns=mo

Brunei to pass Sharia law that will punish gay sex with death by stoning

Brunei will pass its Sharia Penal Code by 3 April, Gay Star News has learned. Penal code includes death by stoning for people convicted of sodomy

gaystarnews.com

Jacobsen: What are concerns unique to the homosexual ex-Muslim community?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": Above!

Jacobsen: At the same, what are the benefits in the newfound freedom for the homosexuals who leave Islam?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": Freedom of Expression, allowed to be Gay and Religious Freedom.

Jacobsen: How can bridges be built between the Muslim and ex-Muslim communities?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": Tolerance and acceptance.

Jacobsen: What is "Gay Ex Muslim"? How did it start out? What are its aims?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": Check out this

piece: https://www.facebook.com/341957429901417/posts/399438910819935?sfns=mo

We welcome and stand with #Refugees. We have joined forces with Worcestershire Pride,
Out2gether and Law & Justice Solicitors with our campaign #EmpoweringRefugees to create a
safe space and support LGBT and/or Secular asylum seekers and refugees. We are proud and
grateful to our local communities and organisations for their enormous support and love.
Together we can achieve peace and live in a community where all #HumanRights are equally
lived. We work closely with our support network to ensure #Refugees voices are heard and
listened. We will forever defend, where we see violations of #HumanRights through our support
network. We believe in #LocalLove, supporting the local communities and homeless. Our
support networks and allies include: Humanists UK, Amnesty International UK (Amnesty UK
LGBTI), Peter Tatchell (Peter Tatchell Foundation), Humanists International, Council of ExMuslims of Britain (CEMB), Emerald Life and our support network's allies.
https://worcestershirepride.org/community

Gay Ex Muslim

Jacobsen: What are other groups, pages, or organizations providing space and benefits, e.g., protections and a voice, for the ex-Muslim homosexual community – or simply individuals?

Administrator, "Gay Ex Muslim": Check out this

piece: https://www.facebook.com/341957429901417/posts/399438910819935?sfns=mo

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time.

Ask Professor Rosenthal 1 – On Chance, Luck, and Statistics: "I Had No Need of That Hypothesis"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 12, 2019

<u>Dr. Jeffrey S. Rosenthal</u> is a Professor of Statistics at the University of Toronto. Here we talk about the Computer Age and statistics.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You wrote a new book entitled *Knock On Wood*. Why, in the Computer Age, is statistics more relevant than ever?

Professor Jeffrey Rosenthal: Because of automation, we have access to more data than ever before. Every time you purchase something with a credit card, or enter a bus with your transit pass, or visit a web page, or pass a road toll, that is logged in a data file somewhere. The result is an unprecedented amount of information. The challenge then becomes, how can we *process* that information? How can we *interpret* it? How can we *learn* from it? How can we use it to our advantage, to make better decisions and allocate our resources more wisely? That is where statistical analysis comes in.

Statistics and probability are also used in the computer algorithms themselves. If you take a public opinion poll, you have to sample people *randomly* to get an accurate result. Similarly, computers are using randomness more and more to learn complicated relationships, which in turn allow them to perform amazing tasks like recognising faces and songs and fingerprints.

Jacobsen: Our world is infused with chance. We live with limited knowledge. We are continually faced with choices. Right there, we face a world of uncertain choices, and so chance and luck. Also, we can be faced with bunk beliefs throughout the culture: astrology, horoscopes, numerology, lucky charms, and the like. How can knowledge of the way the world works and the basics of statistics, chance, and, indeed, luck, set us on a proper path to critical thinking about the world?

Rosenthal: In both my books (<u>Struck By Lightning</u> and <u>Knock On Wood</u>), I have tried to argue that just a little bit of understanding of the principles of randomness — probabilities, and selection biases, and statistical significance, and so on — can go a long way towards helping us to interpret the evidence around us more accurately. I think superstitious beliefs arise on the one hand because humans feel a need to "explain" outcomes even if they are actually random, and on the other hand because humans don't have a good understanding of low probability events, and how to avoid what I call "luck traps" which trick us into drawing conclusions which can't be drawn. The more data and information we have, the more important it is to think critically and wisely about the world around us and what we can truly learn about it.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Professor Rosenthal.

Interview with Administrator of "Ex-Muslim Memes"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 13, 2019

Here we talk with the Administrator of "Ex-Muslim Memes" about ex-Muslims, memes in a colloquial sense, and online community building.

Preamble: "I'll try to keep this as short as possible... and I speak for myself, I don't know how things are for other ex-Muslims and their community..."

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In terms of the ex-Muslim community, what do they tend to find funny or amusing about Islam after leaving it?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Memes": It's funny how my friends and family value my opinion when buying a new car, computer, mobile phone or when it comes to carrier and other problems, but suddenly my opinion does not matter when it comes to religion. They say that I should be a scholar before my opinion starts counting.

Jacobsen: How does this sensibility differ with the types of Islam that some ex-Muslims may be coming from?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Memes": There are two types of Islam. One that allows rational thinking and forces us to form our own opinion about God, Quran, existence, and heaven and hell: we can not come to the conclusion that these do not exist in any way.

Another one is that does not allow any rational thinking and we must accept God, heaven, hell, reward, punishment, etc. Any doubts that arrive in our mind is the work of Satan.

Ex-Muslims coming from any of these backgrounds have one thing in common that they like to think and rationally assess all the religious matters.

However, most often the former does not hold it against Islam that it stopped us from thinking, but the latter blame it on religion for stopping us thinking.

Jacobsen: Why was "Ex-Muslim Memes" founded in the first place?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Memes": It was founded for entertainment purposes. Also, the fact that most of the Islamic teachings are spread by meme; not on the internet but in real life.

We should have our own way of presenting our views and have our own culture. For example; most Muslims don't need to say anything against gays.

They just refer to the story of prophet LOT, if a husband follows the wishes of a wife or they like to make major decisions together; other people will spread the word that he is being "עָט מעַבַּ" "follower of women."

It is alarming because Allah has made men in charge/leaders and women the follower, and so on.

Jacobsen: How has this page grown over time?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Memes": It has grown slowly. Because I could not ask for help from my friends and family.

My identity as a creator of this page is unknown to anyone I know. So, it's mostly people who liked our posts shared the content and it's growing because of that.

Jacobsen: What has been the feedback from the online Muslims about the page?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Memes": The feedback of online ex-Muslims. Usually, ex-Muslims from my country do not interact with the page or the post because by interacting they may reveal their identity.

Although, in my country, leaving religion is not a capital crime, but sharing/speaking something against religion, prophet, religious figure, or Quran can be considered as blasphemy, which is a capital crime and can be punished as life imprisonment or death.

Jacobsen: Any recommended pages, writers, thinkers, or books on leaving Islam?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Memes": "Pakistani freethinkers" is a good group to join on Facebook groups. Usually, posters use an alias to protect their identity, but their content is good quality. Also, "Satanic Verses" by Salman Rushdie is a great book.

Jacobsen: How can others becoming involved in supporting the ex-Muslim community?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Memes": It depends on which ex-Muslim community you are talking about. Ex-Muslims in Islamic countries cannot reveal their identity, or leave fundamentalist Islam. As long as you believe in Allah and the Quran to be the word of Allah, nothing will happen.

In some Muslims countries, we can get persecuted for revealing that we have left Islam or think Islam is not the religion of God. In some Islamic countries, you can leave Islam without any consequences, but being vocal against Islam can get you in trouble.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion based on the conversation today?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslim Memes": Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my feelings and opinion.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time.

Atheist"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 14, 2019

Azis is the Administrator of "Ex-Muslims Atheist." Here we talk some ex-Muslim communities.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you become involved in the ex-Muslim community?

Azis: I became involved in the ex-Muslim community around 3 years ago. I was not a part of the community until a year later after I found out about the "Ex-Muslim Atheist" page and soon became involved with other ex-Muslims and befriending some of them.

I remain friends with them to this day. The journey was actually what most closeted ex-Muslims go through. Curiosity leads to great things here as I was a silent lurker for most and became active after I found more people like me and now, here I am.

Jacobsen: What were some pivotal moments in questioning the tenets of Islam?

Azis: The pivotal moments came when my best friend died by suicide in 2015. I was a devout Muslim for most of my life, but I became a skeptic after I reached the age of 13-14.

There were some historical inaccuracies that led me to question the severity of the claim such as the female infanticide and the kingdom of Solomon but I never truly did question the verses in the Quran out of fear.

Then Charlie Hebdo took place right in 2015, I began to question myself and my faith. Seeing Muslims commenting about that wasn't "true" Islam despite the fact that it was very much condoned by it yet at the same time, these same people were celebrating their deaths made me upset.

That was the day my morality took over my blind faith. It helped me see clearly. But after my father died in the same year, I became more devout but my skepticism already grew and the fear faded away slowly.

I began reading more and more so as to fulfill the role of a good Muslim man in my family after he died but only found myself with more contradictions in the Quran.

I found myself losing faith in the community I used to love. My best friend, whom I met in 2014, taught me more about love than Islam ever did. She taught me that I can be a better person, even without religion, and to see her die broke me in a way no one could ever describe.

Not even myself. That was the day I question why God would take away someone I love. I was not disappointed in God, however. Because the next year, I discovered that none of it is real. I just couldn't muster the courage to fully admit it out of fear.

Jacobsen: What parts of Islam simply make no sense whatsoever?

Azis: Me personally, the part where Muhammad supposedly split the moon in two, the way he described how sperm came from the ribs and how he flew on a winged-horse akin to other ancient myths that predate the tale.

These were the ones that baffled me only for me to learn that there were more like these. That was the day I actually began to read the Quran instead of reading the Arabic verses.

Jacobsen: How can questioning Muslims begin to take the next step into becoming ex-Muslims – simply questioning some basic ethical precepts or truth/factual assertions of the faith?

Azis: In my experience, the way to get Muslims into questioning themselves is by getting them to question their own morals. People only want to talk about science if they think they know about the subject, despite the fact what they know of the subject is ill-informed.

Much like how anti-vaxxers want to talk about vaccines but only if it's against vaccine itself. If you present them with facts right away, their cognitive dissonance will kick in and protect them from questioning the truth. Some are able to get them thinking logically but that takes quite the process.

But nothing really gets them from questions quite like a kick in their morals. Isn't it funny how most Muslims are morally better than the faith itself?

Questions like "Is it okay to beat your wife if they refuse sex?" "Do you think it's okay to take in slaves and sell them?" "Do you think killing people in the name of God is justifiable?" "Do you think people being tortured in hell is logical and merciful?"

Most ex-Muslims that came to me were already skeptical about the illogical verses and knew that they are scientifically inaccurate but the fear of hell and god itself is what keeps them from leaving. Tackle these issues first and see the result.

Jacobsen: Why was "Ex Muslims Atheist" started in the first place?

Azis: I came to "Ex Muslim Atheist" only months after the page started. I became aware of its existence in early 2017. I was in a Facebook group and someone had shared one of the page's post where the founder, Harris Sultan, was threatened by extremists with death.

I came and helped with some of the posts by debating with the remaining visitors and offered them psychological questions, much like what I hinted above. He was impressed with the way I answered them and offered me to become an admin. I officially became an admin weeks later, however.

Jacobsen: What is its function as a page?

Azis: The page's function serves as a tool to help Muslims questions the things they were afraid to know or didn't know about whatsoever. However, the page has become a safe place of sort for closeted ex-Muslims to share their harrowing stories of leaving Islam and offer them support.

Kind of like a therapy, in a way. We have also helped ex-Muslims escape their countries and find asylum somewhere and we're hoping to rescue more as soon as I find a way out of my own country as well.

We're hoping to create an organization solely on the rescue of atheists in Islamic countries. But until then, the page will remain the same way it originally serves to offer.

Jacobsen: What are other social media groups like it? Ones to be recommended for continual visiting for good content.

Azis: To my knowledge, there aren't as many support groups for ex-Muslims on social media. There are plenty of pages that offer the same as us, but in terms of support, they are scarce in number.

A good site where I can recommend them to find support and make them feel less alone is a subreddit "Ex Muslims". You will find many that are just like us there. Though the page does get Muslim trolls every now and then so be careful.

Jacobsen: Of those ex-Muslims giving a voice for other ex-Muslims and doing good work, who are they?

Azis: Not a person but a page that is doing good work is a page called "Ex-Muslims of North America", "Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain", and "ExMuslim TV".

I recommend if you have a story to tell yourself without having to worry about being taken out of context or used against you, go there. Or come to us and we'll help you the same.

Jacobsen: How can others help ex-Muslims help themselves in extricating themselves from the oppression of fundamentalist religion?

Azis: The answer to this question is; listen. Just listen. Let ex-Muslims speak for themselves because that's what they have been clamouring for so long. To have someone to listen to them and not be judged for it. This is how you help them be free from the intricacies of the fundamentalists. A safe space for the secularists and free-thinkers can do great things. Not only that, they have impressive knowledge about Islam – something that many don't know of, quite surprisingly. The thing that often steers ex-Muslims to the far-right is not the far-right themselves but kind-hearted liberals who seeks to silence other ex-Muslims from speaking because they believe what we know of Islam isn't as lovely as they hear from other Muslims. They marginalize us despite the fact that we are the most oppressed group of people in the world. I, myself, am a leftist liberal and I fear that my fellow ex-Muslims turn into the far-right and the most common complain that I hear is that liberals are (one of) the main factor to this. Believe me, most of us are liberals ourselves. We believe in the value of freedom and acceptance. Something Islam is clearly against. We do not wish to see the world become more conservative as it is. We have experienced that here in our own Islamic countries.

Jacobsen: How can others support organizations like the ex-Muslim councils or the public figures, or the social media groups or pages, in their efforts in bringing forward a confident ex-Muslim community and collective voice?

Azis: Make sure they are not alone. Keep on supporting and cheering them if you wish to fight against the oppression from the fundamentalists but make sure they are all safe first. If they're still in an Islamic country, give them options to help them leave.

Give them a platform to speak, a platform to write, a platform to share. This is how you can build a generation of confident ex-Muslims all around the world.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Azis: My final thoughts about this is simple: Thank you. Thank you for giving me a chance to speak. Thank you for giving me a chance to share my stories. I sincerely hope that this will be helpful, not just for the ex-Muslims, but to everyone else reading this. Isn't it great to have someone to listen to you?

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

Interview with George Martin – Spokesperson, Anonymous for the Voiceless

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 15, 2019

George Martin is a Spokesperson for Anonymous for the Voiceless. Here we talk about Anonymous for the Voiceless.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Although, the organization is an anonymous-oriented one. I will still ask if you're willing. What was family and personal background? What is the story there?

George Martin: For me, and for most others in the group, it was the same. We were all raised non-vegan, but came to veganism later in life. I grew up supporting all forms of animal exploitation. I am the only vegan in my entire family (including extended) and it's the same for most of us!

Jacobsen: How is Anonymous for the Voiceless providing activism on-the-ground for total animal liberation? Also, what is implied by the phrase "total animal liberation".

Martin: The focus of our activism is the 'Cube of Truth' demo, whereby we take to the streets and present ourselves as a static art piece which shows graphic footage of the animal exploitation industries (meat, dairy, eggs, leather, vivisection, etc.). We talk to bystanders about veganism and give them information (in the form of a card) which allows them to go away after the conversation and look into some of the stuff we've talked to them about themselves (documentaries, YouTube videos, books, studies, etc.).

By "total animal liberation", we mean that we are in no way a welfarist group, i.e. we do not promote so-called "humane" methods of animal exploitation like "grass-fed" or "free range". We are an abolitionist group, so we are trying to promote the message that there is no right way to do the wrong thing, i.e. that there is no nice way of enslaving and murdering a sentient being who does not wish to die.

Jacobsen: How can individuals work to assist Anonymous for the Voiceless, either directly or indirectly?

Martin: The amazing thing about AV is that any vegan can set up their own chapter (we use the term "chapter" to refer to a certain city/town's demo group), wherever they are in the world. All they have to do is email join@anonymousforthevoiceless.org stating the chapter they wish to set up and we do all we can to assist them setting one up, including sourcing volunteers and promoting their first event. People can also donate to the organisation via cubeoftruth.com

Jacobsen: What are other individuals or organizations doing similar animal rights work?

Martin: There are many other brilliant outreach groups out there, such as Earthlings Experience, which is the same principle (showing footage to bystanders and conversing with them about the footage). With regards to specific individuals, it is hard to pick one out, as the Cube of Truth is very much a team-based demonstration, so it's not something solo activists generally do.

Jacobsen: What is the fundamental ethic underlying the work of Anonymous for the Voiceless?

Martin: That animals are not ours to eat, wear, use, experiment on, and do as we please with. We also promote the environmental and health benefits of a plant-based diet, but our focus is on the ethics of using animals.

Jacobsen: What have been effective tactics and strategies of Anonymous for the Voiceless?

Martin: Many activists within the organisation run "outreach workshops", which aim to improve the skills of volunteers and get them more confident speaking to bystanders. We also have a highly organised structure, with lots of documents that our volunteers can read to help them prepare for their demonstration and ensure everything is conducted in a professional manner. We pride ourselves on our effectiveness and professionalism, and as such, our demos yield results (we know this because it is a common occurrence that people join our group having previously passed by our demonstrations as a non-vegan themselves).

Jacobsen: What have been honest failures and real successes of Anonymous for the Voiceless? How can others learn from the failures and build on/replicate the successes?

Martin: The organisation was founded by Paul Bashir and Asal Alamdari a few years ago, and through trial and error we have found what works and what doesn't. One thing we found that didn't make our outreach as effective at first was the type of footage we showed on some occasions. For example, we'd show footage to bystanders of cows and pigs at sanctuaries, showing them that this is how animals SHOULD be living, but this didn't work because many bystanders mistook this footage for "high welfare" farm footage and assumed we were a welfarist group. As such, we removed it and focused only on the graphic stuff so the message was clear. We also focused too heavily on the food industry previously, which is a mistake, because we are not there to just promote a diet—we want to make it clear to people that animals are also enslaved and abused for clothing, for cosmetic products, and for entertainment. So our message from this to other animal rights groups is to make sure there is a very clear vegan message if you want to see real results (otherwise people will just change what they eat and not what they wear, or what they brush their teeth with, and so on!).

Jacobsen: Any recommended authors or speakers?

Martin: I cannot speak for everyone in the organisation as we have thousands of volunteers all over the world and there is no one thing we all agree other than that we are vegan... but for me, personally, I highly recommend watching Gary Yourofksy's 'Best Speech You Will Ever Hear' on YouTube. That's what changed me in the first place (back in 2012 when I came across it by chance while online one day, as a meat eater!) and it's featured on our outreach cards that we give to bystanders also.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Martin: Yes! I would like to address my fellow atheists reading this: many atheist non-vegans say veganism is like a "religion" in order to discredit it, but nothing could be further than the truth. Vegans are not trying to show you anything that is NOT directly observable—it's not faith-based in the slightest. In fact, there is a quote that is extremely relevant to the graphic footage we show people to document the reality of what happens to animals every day because of most people's consumer choices: "Religion is getting people to believe in things they can't see. Veganism is getting people to see things they don't want to believe." In fact, we are very much

conditioned into eating animal products from birth—no one naturally sees a dog as friend and a cow as a food source... it's all a learned prejudice, known as "speciesism". So the reasons we have for viewing various species of animals as we do are completely arbitrary—these are merely learned prejudices.

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

Interview with Shannon Hardy – Founder, Abortion Support Services Atlantic (Halifax, N.S.)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 16, 2019

Shannon Hardy is the Founder of the Abortion Support Services Atlantic (Halifax, Nova Scotia). Here we talk about her life, work, and views.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Were early experiences from family or personal life influential on the decision to become professionally involved in the provision of abortion services?

Shannon Hardy: I was raised in a community that helped each other, my mom and my aunties were strong, fierce feminists.

Jacobsen: Why was the Abortion Support Services Atlantic (Halifax NS) founded in the first place? Who founded it?

Hardy: I (Shannon) am the founder of ASSA (then Maritime Abortion Support Services). It can about because there were no abortion services available on PEI in 2012 and people needed a way to get to Halifax for their procedure.

Jacobsen: What have been some major developments and setbacks for the Abortion Support Services Atlantic (Halifax NS), as an organization?

Hardy: As of 2016, ASSA started offering trauma informed support training. And in 2019 we created our first board of Directors.

Jacobsen: Since Abortion Support Services Atlantic (Halifax NS) is entirely volunteer-run, how does this influence the possible extent of the services provided by it?

Hardy: In some ways being volunteer run limits us, because we can't offer gas money or other financial help for our volunteers but it also means we're not beholden to anyone.

Jacobsen: What is a central barrier to pregnant individuals from getting safe and equitable access to abortions in Nova Scotia? What is a barrier to pregnant individuals from getting safe and equitable access to abortions in Canada?

Hardy: The biggest barrier to access is political will. By allowing medical facilities and medical professionals to deny people access to a medical procedure simply because those facilities and professionals don't want to provide abortion is unconscionable.

Other barriers are resistance to utilizing telehealth for follow up, not prioritizing ultrasounds for abortions and not educating the public the same way they do for other medical procedures.

Jacobsen: What have been tragic stories and heartwarming stories around women's reproductive rights in Nova Scotia?

Hardy: I think the tragedy is that we don't truly have universal health care.

One of my favourite stories is when we set up a drive for someone who was adamant that they couldn't tell their family and they didn't want anyone in their town finding out.

I offered support via text, found a volunteer and the evening before the appointment, the person texted and said they told their sister and didn't need a ride because she was going to drive her.

She followed up that text by saying that the only reason she was able to tell her sister was because of the unconditional support ASSA extended to her, and she thought, if we could offer that maybe it was ok and she could talk to her sister.

And that is the reason we do what we do. We are here to give unconditional support, we are only here to serve, with no strings and no agenda.

Jacobsen: Any recommended authors, organizations, or speakers? Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion based on the conversation today?

Hardy: I know I left some of the answers blank but I think Emma answers those. Thank you for reaching out!

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

Interview with Administrator of "Ex-Muslims of India"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 17, 2019

Here we talk with the Administrator of "Ex-Muslims of India."

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: For those leaving Islam in India, what are the main difficulties for them?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": Well, to be honest, the main difficulties be it Muslims in India or Muslims elsewhere is the belief system that has been shoved down their brains, Islam or religion, in general, isn't just a thought process, what can be eliminated with a different thought.

They are indoctrinated by this set of beliefs and ideologies, that are hard or nearly impossible to shackle themselves out of it. So, all their life, right from the beginning; they grew up with this doctrine of Islam, by parents, society or whatever.

They lived their whole life in this rainbow bubble of Islam being the most peaceful and feminist religion and happy secular religion.

Problem isn't the doctrine, they themselves are the problem to them, what I've experienced from Indian Muslims in general is: they aren't eager to know more about their religion; they never step out of that bubble to explore their or any other religion; they are happy being brainwashed by the set of beliefs their parents shoved down on them.

Most of them have no idea about the reality of Islam. They have no idea of how many books of hadith they have. Whenever they try to step out of this bubble, their whole life shatters right beside them, and they couldn't survive it; and the only option they have is to return back to that very bubble their parents created around them, and their parents along with them too, live life in such a bubble.

Yes, so whenever someone tries to break through it, he's ridiculed, backlashed, abandoned, or disowned by their parents. Children in India aren't given that freedom after their 18th birthday where they can go and thrillingly live their life accordingly as it happens in Canada, the US, or Europe.

They are meant to grow out with their parents until their parents die, so in a culture like this where they literally can't survive alone out, getting disowned by their parents is like a death to them, so in fear of this most of them being rational and logical don't take the step and leave religion, they just go on with it their whole life.

Jacobsen: What are the forms of support that ex-Muslims in India need most now?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": The form of support ex-Muslims in India need is freedom of speech, to talk about their former religion without the fear of death or lynching.

A platform where they can come up with their thoughts and ideas to eliminate the dangers of religion. My idea of getting this page was for this sole reason, so more of Muslims come out for help to us and so we can be a help to them.

Jacobsen: Who are important Indian secular voices and ex-Muslim voices?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": I don't think so. There aren't many secular voices that openly criticize the idea of religion; India calling themselves the most secular and democratic country still is bonded by the dogma of religion, be it Islam or Hinduism, voicing themselves out here is still a danger to their lives, fewer people open up about their voices and they are backlashed by the media and the society as a whole.

Ex-Muslim voices? I don't think so, there isn't any, whoever tried to were either killed or flew to another country for a safer place to live.

Jacobsen: What support and community does the online world provide for ex-Muslim Indians?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": Well, to be honest as of now, I don't think so; it did not do any good for them or maybe they never tried to get the support from them since they still fear of exposing themselves out. But I do hope, if someone comes out in need of help, the online world doesn't fail him/her.

Jacobsen: How can ex-Muslim Indians self-empower?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": By learning more of the ridiculousness of their religion and counter them as a whole to whoever he can and try to break the cycle of being the parent-child, get out of it and live a life as their own. Yes, it will be hard, but it will only be better for them on a bigger level.

Jacobsen: How can others help to undermine religious fundamentalism at its roots in India alongside Indian ex-Muslims?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": A moral support I believe would be enough, because that's the only thing India ex-Muslims lack as of now. There are none to stand beside them to undermine religions. We personally need that moral hand support.

Jacobsen: Any recommended organizations or authors?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": Nope, I couldn't come across any that would be a bit of help to us or ex-muslims I know of.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": I agree, it's hard to us to leave a religion, we are taught from the start, we grew up in religion more than we grew up in enjoyment.

We were forced down religion from the very start of our life, getting out of it is hard, but worth every sweat, pain, and blood. Once you're out, you'll know the feeling of being a free bird, life in a blue sky and not a cage.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time.

Administrator, "Ex-Muslims of India": Thank you!

Ask Rob 1 – Non-Holy Writ, or Secular Lit: Lighting the Fire of Freethought

Scott Douglas Jacobsen
April 18, 2019

Rob Boston is the Editor of Church & State (Americans United for Separation of Church and State). Here we talk about freethinking literature.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Let's start with some general historical context for this series, what were some of the earliest sources of freethinking writing in the world?

Rob Boston: I'm not an expert in this area, but I guess it depends on how far back you want to go and how you define "freethinking." There were ancient Greeks who cast doubt upon the existence of the gods, so they were probably among the first freethinkers.

In the late Roman era, many cite the views of Hypatia, who has become a symbol of resistance to dogmatic Christianity even though she was herself a Pagan.

During the Middle Ages, church and state were combined in the Western world, and public expressions of doubt of the claims of Christianity could cost you your life. I'm sure there were freethinkers around then, but my guess is that they kept a low profile.

Jacobsen: Who were some of the first authors, and what were some of the first publications and books, for the secular and freethinking in the United States?

Boston: Many people would look to Thomas Paine's "The Age of Reason" as the first American work of freethought. Paine was not an atheist, but he certainly cast doubt on the claims of revealed religion and championed Deism.

I would also argue for Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was also not an atheist but his editing of the Gospels in what is now called "The Jefferson Bible" and his attempts to merge rational thought with Christianity by stripping away its miraculous claims were, I think, important steps along the way.

From there we go to the men and women who wrote during what has been called the Golden Age of freethought in the late 19th century – Robert Ingersoll, Matilda Gage, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others.

For anyone who wants to learn more about this period, I highly recommend Susan Jacoby's book "Freethinkers."

Interview with Emma Duke – Board Director of Communications, Abortion Support Services Atlantic

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 19, 2019

Emma Duke is the Board Director of Communications on the Board of Directors of the Abortion Support Services Atlantic (Halifax, Nova Scotia). Here we talk about her life, work, and views.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: For the abortion services in the Atlantic, what are the important points to bear in mind?

Emma Duke: Abortion Support Services Atlantic (ASSA) is a 100% volunteer-run organization. We are a grass-roots, pro-choice feminist group working to increase access to abortion, while also providing education and outreach.

ASSA delivers abortion doula training throughout the Atlantic provinces, where volunteers are trained to provide non-medical support to people who are ending their pregnancy.

This can include emotional support before, during or after an abortion, information, assistance with transportation and navigating the healthcare system.

Jacobsen: How was the Abortion Support Services Atlantic founded?

Duke: Shannon Hardy founded ASSA in 2012 as a response to the major gaps in services for people accessing abortion services in the maritime provinces.

Knowing that transportation is a major barrier, at the time residents of PEI had to leave the island to terminate a pregnancy, coupled with stigma and difficulty navigating the healthcare system, Shannon decided to do something about it.

She started a Facebook group connecting people seeking abortion services to volunteers. It has since grown into a well-known group, having served over 300 people. Shannon regularly facilitates abortion doula training throughout the Atlantic region.

Jacobsen: What have been the major stages of growth and development for Abortion Support Services Atlantic?

Duke: In 2017 we changed our name from Maritime Abortion Support Services To Abortion Support Services Atlantic to recognize Newfoundland and Labrador.

We had already been doing education and outreach in the province, so we wanted our name to reflect that. Most recently, we announced our inaugural board of directors in January 2019 and we are currently in the process of becoming a registered non-profit organization.

Jacobsen: Who has been the main opposition to the provision of abortion services in this geographic locale? Why?

Duke: ASSA was founded and is based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, yet any opposition from the community is generally the same in each of the Atlantic provinces. The most vocal opposition include faith-based groups that campaign from an anti-choice perspective.

Jacobsen: What have been their central tactics in the past?

Duke: These groups tend to use scare tactics that are not based on fact or evidence-based research. For example, one group was espousing that surgical abortion causes breast cancer.

Instilling fear in people who may be feeling vulnerable is a common theme we see. Harassment is another tactic used, where protestors will rally and even take photos of people entering and leaving the clinic.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, "bubble zone" legislation was introduced in 2016 to create safe access zones around abortion clinics. Anti-choice groups were harassing physicians and other service providers at the clinic and outside their own homes.

Another tactic that has been used by anti-choice groups are crisis pregnancy centers. These are clinics that on the surface appear to offer abortion as an option for unplanned pregnancies, however actually operate with an anti-abortion agenda.

These are extremely dangerous because folks who are unaware and enter the crisis pregnancy centers are often counselled against having abortions. The tactics used are espousing false medical information, deceptive advertising and use of ultrasound.

Ultrasound imaging is used as a last-ditch effort into pressuring service users into keeping the pregnancy. Again, these centers are often run by faith-based groups or organizations. The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada maintains an up to date list of crisis pregnancy centers in Canada.

Jacobsen: What have been their central tactics in the present?

Duke: We're definitely noticing that anti-choice rhetoric and campaigns are moving beyond the traditional protests outside of clinics. In 2018 Dartmouth, Nova Scotia witnessed the emergence of a billboard with anti-choice content on one of the area's busiest roads.

The organization mentioned on the billboard is actually based in British Columbia, which shows us just how far-reaching and damaging the anti-choice messages are. These campaigns to make abortion illegal fuel the stigma around accessing abortion services.

New Brunswick has one abortion clinic, Clinic 554, which opened after the Morgentaler Clinic closed its doors. Located right next door is the Women's Care Center, a crisis pregnancy center. Again, we understand their approach to be deceptive, false information and scare-tactics.

Jacobsen: How can other organizations and activists anticipate, prepare for, and overcome such efforts in the future?

Duke: It's important to be able to recognize what a crisis pregnancy center looks like and not refer people there. It's also important to do your homework: learn who the anti-choice groups are and how they operate.

Be prepared to debunk their false information and come equipped with actual facts. Working together is very important, especially at the grassroots level.

ASSA strives to build healthy relationships with clinics, abortion providers and our volunteers. Trust is a major component in this work.

Jacobsen: What are the main concerns for Abortion Support Services Atlantic and its constituency now?

Duke: As a growing organization, we're hoping to expand our reach beyond Nova Scotia. Two of our board members are located in Newfoundland and Labrador and we're hoping that will help our outreach.

Our volunteer list is growing and we hope to improve access to abortions for folks living in rural and remote areas.

Jacobsen: How can the public become more involved, help protect the services, and expand the provision of safe and equitable abortion services – as a fundamental human right – in the Atlantic?

Duke: This comes down to reproductive healthcare. Making decisions about one's own body and reproductive choices is a basic human and healthcare right.

I think it's important to keep that message on the forefront in order for the public to become more involved and protect access to abortion services. Having a public platform to educate and inform the public can be powerful in fuelling advocacy as well.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Duke: While we have made strides in reproductive healthcare, there is still a lot of work to be done. Mifegymiso is still not covered by all provincial health plans throughout the country.

Folks living in rural communities face tremendous barriers in accessing abortion services, whether it be surgical or medical. Either case requires an ultrasound, which can be challenging to obtain in remote communities. Transportation is another obstacle.

Anyone living in Labrador has to travel to St. John's for a surgical abortion. Factored into the cost is flight, accommodations, gas, and potentially missing days of work. After 35 years, Prince Edward Island recently opened their first abortion clinic in Summerside.

However, travel is still a major barrier for accessing the service. Throughout the Atlantic provinces, coverage for abortions is also dependant on location in some areas. If a surgical abortion is performed in a clinic, it is not always covered by the provincial health plan.

We would like to see full coverage regardless of where the procedure occurs, the removal of mandatory ultrasound and counselling and other barriers removed for folks living in rural and remote communities.

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

Ask Annie Laurie 2 – Secular Women's Leadership and 21st-Century Men

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 20, 2019

Annie Laurie Gaylor is the Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) with Dan Barker. She has been part of the fight against the encroachment of religion on secular culture, and human and women's rights for decades. Here we talk about secular women in leadership and 21st-century men.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Building on the former responses of the first session, who have been important voices of men for equality of the sexes and genders?

Annie Laurie Gaylor: John Stuart Mill, a freethinker who wrote The Subjection of Women in 1869 (with aid of his wife Harriet Taylor Mill), Robert Dale Owens, the great Frederick Douglass, who was a participant at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, Robert G. Ingersoll, the agnostic orator and writer was a firm advocate for women's rights.

Jacobsen: As the 21st century has progressed, what seems like modern, unique issues for men – emergent ones – in the secular communities?

Gaylor: I guess you'd have to ask men.:) Perhaps: learning to share the power, the podium, to adapt to a changing world where women and people of color are as invested as they are in espousing secularism.

Jacobsen: With women's voices heard more into the late 20th and early 21st centuries, what have been the distinct forms of women's leadership emerging in the secular communities? Why have they formed in this way if distinct?

Gaylor: Certainly the 19th and early 20th century women freethinkers almost all shared, as a rule, a commitment to the importance of this world, the only world we know, and improving life here on earth, instead of wasting time, money and energy on an imaginary or speculative afterlife. Women freethinkers tend to be very practical. We have faith in ourselves, our rights, the potential of humankind and in the natural world.

Today most women freethinkers are deeply committed to equality and reproductive rights for women; it's often a shared passion with freethought. I don't know if I can comment on distinct forms of female leadership, but the commitment to freeing women is solid, and this is true on an international level. The women unbelievers in Morocco or Bangladesh or from Poland cannot escape the heavy hand of religion on women.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Annie Laurie.

Interview with Richael – Media/Social Media Working Group, Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 21, 2019

Richael is with the Media/Social Media Working Group of the Abortion Rights Campaign. Here we speak frankly on women's reproductive rights.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As a grassroots movement oriented around the advancement and empowerment of women through activism for safe, free, and equitable abortions, do other similar campaigns exist in the world, in case others want to become active and involved in their own locale?

Richael: Absolutely, there are countless dedicated activists trying to advance abortion rights across the globe. Many of these groups, like ourselves, have spent years fighting for access to safe and legal abortion. In the current climate where we are seeing the rollback of reproductive rights internationally, we are proud that countries like Ireland have bucked that trend by introducing pro-choice laws and hope that this can be a source of hope for others. The fight for abortion rights is a global one and we stand in solidarity with activists across the world as they continue to fight for their basic reproductive rights. Getting involved with these groups is generally pretty easy to do – many of them, like ourselves, are volunteer-based and welcome any support. For anyone thinking about whether or not to get involved, my advice would be to go for it! It's the best thing many of us in the Abortion Rights Campaign have ever done.

To name but a few of our neighbouring campaign groups:

Alliance for Choice, Northern Ireland (our sister organisation)

CALM, Isle of Man

Pro Choice Gibraltar, Gibraltar

Voice for Choice, Malta

Sister Supporter, UK

Jacobsen: Why are the criteria of safe, free, and equitable important for the provision of abortion, of this fundamental human right?

Richael: At ARC, we fight for free, safe, legal and local abortion for all who need or want it. Cost should never prove a barrier to people accessing basic healthcare. Aside from the costs of the actual procedure, it is crucial that abortion be accessible to all who need it. While we welcome the Irish Government's commitment to providing abortion within the public healthcare system, we know that people needing to make multiple trips to a GP (necessitated by the non-evidence-based mandatory waiting period) or travel long distances incur additional, unequitable, costs. Furthermore, people living in Northern Ireland are being forced to pay at least €450 for an abortion in the South. Safe abortion means basing practice on best medical evidence and adopting a person-centred, non-discriminatory approach. There are many ways in which this is lacking from the current system. Mandatory waiting periods, refusal of care, vague criteria and anti-choice harassment outside clinics are just a few of the problems we're experiencing with the

new law. Legal abortion means legal for all. The continued criminalisation of medical practitioners is something we remain extremely concerned about – as it creates a chilling effect whereby some medics interpret the law overly cautiously for fear of prosecution. We've already seen this play out in Ireland, with certain hospitals attempting to lower the (already incredibly tight) cut-off point of 12 weeks. We have called on the Government to rectify these problems and will continue to do so for as long as is necessary. We are fully prepared to keep fighting until *truly* free, safe, legal and local abortion is achievable for all. And after that, we'll fight to maintain it.

Jacobsen: What is Together for Yes? How is the level of grassroots organizing effective for political and policy-level change in society?

Richael: Together for Yes was the National civil society group that successfully campaigned for a Yes vote in the referendum to repeal the 8th amendment. It was founded by ARC, the Coalition to Repeal the 8th and the National Women's Council of Ireland. ARC was built from the grassroots – we are a non-hierarchical, intersectional, all-volunteer group who have not compromised our position, in spite of many telling us we were "too extreme". We were unequivocal in our asks from day 1 – free, safe, legal abortion – and nothing less. We spoke the word "abortion" when many were afraid to do so, and we made it our mission to break down stigma. The importance of this committed, on-the-ground activism cannot be underestimated. Without it, our restrictive laws might never have received the condemnation they did from international monitoring bodies. We'd probably still be waiting for a referendum announcement – let alone a yes vote and a law which permits abortion on request in early pregnancy.

Jacobsen: What was the 8th Amendment to the Irish constitution? How was the Abortion Rights Campaign crucial in its repeal?

Richael: The 8th amendment was the article in the Irish Constitution which equated the life of the pregnant person with that of an embryo, prohibiting abortion in effectively all circumstances. Its' existence was a form state-sanctioned obstetric violence. The 8th forced hundreds of thousands of pregnant people overseas in order to obtain basic healthcare – and forced many more (often those without the means to travel) to import safe but illegal abortion pills, risking up to 14 years in prison. Tragically, women have died at the hands of the 8th amendment.

There are a myriad of ways in which the Abortion Rights Campaign proved crucial to the repeal of the 8th amendment, but perhaps one of the most important things we did was to re-shape the conversation around abortion – breaking down stigma and providing space for people who'd had abortions in Ireland to share their stories.

Jacobsen: Why is the respect for women's rights indicative of the health of a society and of the level of equality in society? How can abortion be a rough estimate as to the level of respect for the rights and autonomy of women?

Richael: Having control over one's own body is one of the most fundamental human rights their is. If we restrict that right from half our population, how can we claim to have equality when it comes to any other aspect of our lives?

Jacobsen: How is the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill key for the provision of free, safe, and equitable abortion for women in Ireland?

Richael: The Health (Termination of Pregnancy) Act will, for the first time in Ireland's history, enable some people to have an abortion on request. It is a monumental step forward and a powerful recognition of just how fundamentally grassroots campaigning has changed Ireland. However, the Act is not without its' flaws – as we have outlined above – and we have a long way to go until we achieve the free, safe, legal standard of care that is needed.

Jacobsen: Looking at the real successes and honest failures of the Abortion Rights Campaign at all levels, what can other individuals, organizations, and movements learn from them?

Richael: That is to say, the increasing of the probability of more successes and the fight for the reduction in failures or simply learning from failures in the historical records. One big lesson would be: don't compromise in your asks. One lesson Ireland learnt as a result of this, and previous referenda (e.g. equal marriage in 2015) is that people are more open than they are sometimes given credit for. On the flip side, what happened in Ireland is not a perfect model for how to achieve policy change. We should never have had to have a Citizens Assembly or a referendum in order to access our basic human rights. Nor should people have had to bare their souls and their stories to strangers, or be subject to the abuse that they faced on the streets and the doorsteps. The referendum campaign was traumatic for many and its' wounds will take time to heal. It also failed to adequately represent the diversity of voices in the pro-choice movement and Ireland as a whole. We are looking to address these issues as we move forward with our activism – and to do that in collaboration with groups who were underrepresented in the referendum campaign. Another, crucially important, lesson is that the activism does not stop when the laws are passed – far from it. We know that laws are better where activists stay involved – we also know that rights hard won are easily lost. We've fought too hard to give up fighting now.

Jacobsen: Why are abortion rights fought against by their main oppositions? Who are the main oppositions to abortion rights in Ireland? What are the main lies told by the opposition in the past, right into the present, and more recently (as in novel lies or smears, or mischaracterizations)? Following the last question, what truths dispel these myths?

Richael: At their root, all anti-choice arguments really come down to is patriarchy. And believing that women and people with wombs are not deserving of bodily autonomy. There are countless myths about abortion perpetuated by the anti-choice side, none of which it would be helpful to name. If you're looking for the truth, the pro-choice community has <u>evidence</u> on its' side. Like the fact that making abortion illegal doesn't lower abortion rates – it just increases the risk of unsafe abortion. Or the evidence which shows that exceptions-based models of provision harm pregnant people.

Jacobsen: In Canada, we have Dr. Henry Morgentaler as a leading light in the historical record. Who are other bright lights in the historical record for the reproductive rights of women – but in Ireland?

Richael: In my view, the true 'bright lights' for reproductive rights are the people you'll probably never hear about – the people who shared their abortion stories on the doorsteps and in their own homes. The rural activists who <u>face additional challenges</u> in their work and are often brushed over in Dublin-centric narratives of the referendum campaign. The people who sell merchandise, write papers, fundraise, update websites, organise events – and do all the other (often unglamourous) tasks to ensure that the work gets done.

Jacobsen: Any recommended books or speakers?

Richael: Pro by Katha Pollitt, Autonomy by Kathy D'arcy. Anything by academics Fiona DeLondres and/or Mairead Enright.

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

Ask Kwabena 2 – Organizational Duties, Public Flak, and Outreach

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 22, 2019

Kwabena "Michael" Osei-Assibey is the President of the Humanist Association of Ghana. We will be conducting this educational series to learn more about humanism and secularism within Ghana. Here we talk about divvying-up tasks, flak from some of the public, and then outreach, too.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In terms of the work of the Humanist Association of Ghana, as with other organizations, there is an issue with capacity and capacity-building. How do you divvy-up tasks for everyone? How do you deal, as an organization, with public flak? How do you go about reaching out to a less-than-friendly public at times?

Kwabena "Michael" Osei-Assibey: Like all sentient entities, HAG has faced a few crises on the way to finding itself. The first was at its inception when we faced an identity crisis. The question of who we are came up a lot. At that time, we were just a freethought social group, a space for outliers to meet and be comfortable in their own skin for a few hours. Made up of atheists, deists, agnostics, universalists and freethinkers of various dispositions, settling on humanism as a tag that binds us all was not an easy decision. We lost some members in resolving that crisis. Then came our crisis of purpose – What does HAG want to be. Even if we agree in principle that humanism should be the glue that binds us together, does it call us to a higher purpose? Do we just remain a social group that meets and provides space for freethinkers or are we capable of more? Our first two conferences showed us that we are capable of more. However, they also showed us that with purpose comes responsibility, something that not every member was willing to accept.

The organization remains purely a volunteer organization. Projects are proposed by members who then look for support from within the membership or from our pool of sister activist organizations. For example, a member, Selasie, passionate about the environment, proposed a partnership with another organization, Environment 360, to help clean up the beach as well as participate in a DIY boat race with boats made from recycled plastic bottles. Members got on board and we planned, executed and won the race. Another typical example is our monthly meetings and planned discussions that we have. When I wanted to have a series of conversations on humanism and economics, I sought out experts in the field with the help of members and we had a series of lectures and dialogues on the subject; from capitalism to socialism, and inequality to social justice. Similarly, our series on The history of the universe till now and what predictions we can make about tommorrow, was facilitated by a member, Eugene, who was passionate about the topic. Same can be said about participation in our podcast series as well as video series. In the case of tasks requiring technical audio visual skills, our current communications officer, Thaddeus, has been invaluable in that regard. The central theme here is that, we currently rely on passion for a project and the executives do our best to support whatever project members propose.

Our executive body, is also mandated under our constitution to perform certain keys tasks. Again, all this is volunteer based and so the executive body will sometimes ask for help from the

membership body. There are always members keen to step in and help and HAG has been very fortunate in that regard. I will however state that it has not been easy balancing work and volunteering for activist work. The work-life-activist balance is something that I and many of our frequent-flyer volunteers struggle with and sometimes activism fatigue sets in. HAG is currently on the trajectory to be a political force in national conversations and we should be looking towards building the framework for such a time. We will be falling on Roslyn's experience working with international humanist bodies as well as patrons like Leo Igwe to help with capacity building and planning for such a time. That said, I foresee a future in which HAG has a physical office with a few paid officers to help coordinate all projects and the volunteers that come with them.

Public flak is to be expected in our part of the world given the high levels of religiosity. There are two kinds we face, as a collective and as individuals. As a collective, we sometimes have to issue statements to condemn certain actions or write op-eds about sensitive issues. Depending on the issue, we either face a disproportionate amount of negative comments or quiet support by most sides. For instance, any post or statement showing support for the LGBTQIA+ community will draw in the vilest of comments while our op-eds about noisy churches will even get support from some section of believers. In any of these cases, we moderate the comment section with the goal of educating through calm logic and reasoning, encouraging empathy and solidarity with marginalized groups. On a few occasions, comments have to be deleted because they may cause more harm than serve any educational value. As individuals, our social media walls are prime with public flak on our personal posts about humanism and we mostly treat them the same way we do on our HAG pages. A few of us, in solidarity with minority communities, go on TV or radio to talk about sensitive topics. This is where it gets a bit tricky. Our faces and voices become known and may put us in danger, however, we always argue that our privilege will protect us and so far, we have been right.

In meeting the public, everyone has a different style but it mostly boils down to finding a common ground and being affable. You will almost always find someone discontent with the government, or state of practice of religions and that is a great starting point. Asking questions and just listening while always finding something to agree with before introducing your disagreement or perspective allows for whoever you are speaking to, to feel appreciated and connected to. Also, laying the foundation that you can agree to disagree or that you are not tied to your identity or beliefs and is willing to change your views with new evidence, provides some hope and assurance to whom ever you are speaking to. Mostly, curiosity wins. Most people have never met an atheist or know what humanism is and so are driven by their curiosity to understand how and why any sane person will not believe as they do.

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

Interview with Lois Backus – Executive Director, Medical Students for Choice

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 23, 2019

Lois Backus is the Executive Director of Medical Students for Choice. Here we talk about her background, work, and views.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Just to provide a moderate background, what are some aspects of family and personal story?

Lois Backus: I have been the Executive Director in the field of reproductive health since early 1989, 12 years as the ED of two Planned Parenthood affiliates and 18 years here at Medical Students for Choice. During my time with Planned Parenthood, I added abortion services to the medical services provided at my affiliates clinics and among the challenges inherent in that work (funding the renovations, designing the changes in medical systems, training staff, etc), the greatest challenge was finding a qualified physician to provide the abortions. At my first affiliate, finding a physician took 3 years. I moved to Medical Students for Choice in order to have a positive impact on physicians trained and willing to provide this service for those who need it.

Personally, I have been married for 40 years, have one adult son who is married and has a daughter who is a major source of delight in my life. My entire professional career has been in nonprofit management and advocacy. I came to this career path after serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Afghanistan and witnessing the direct effects of unclean water and food supplies. When I returned to the US, I obtained a Masters in Public Health at Yale University and embarked on my health-related, nonprofit career.

Jacobsen: For those interested in contributing or becoming involved with the organization, even simply donating finances or professional networks, how can they do it? MSFC is a small organization in terms of staff (11) with a powerful reach across the globe (221 student chapters in 24 countries).

Backus: Those interested in learning more about our work can find ample stories and resources at https://msfc.org. Donations can be accepted here https://msfc.org/about-us/giving-to-msfc/. In addition, anyone is welcome to reach out to us at students@msfc.org.

Jacobsen: What the specific advocacy and representation work of Medical Students for Choice? MSFC's mission is Creating Tomorrow's Abortion Providers and Pro-Choice Physicians.

Backus: We work to cultivate and support group advocacy focused on changing institutional and public policy via tactics involving empowering coordinated action by groups of medical students. Student groups (chapters) work to influence their institution's policies and curriculum around reproductive healthcare and join larger community-based and state- or province- or country-wide campaigns to influence health policies in reproductive healthcare. In addition, MSFC provides a range of educational programs for highly motivated individual medical students who wish to learn more about abortion provision and have no access to that education in their home institutions.

Jacobsen: There are over 10,000 medical students and residents represented by the organization. What does this imply for the potential force exerted or influence on public policy and politics around the world? MSFC is 26 years old.

Backus: In that time, graduated members of MSFC have taken on leadership roles in reproductive health and other health specialties that have helped to dramatically increase abortion access (we have former members providing abortions in 42 US states, five Canadian Provinces, and three other countries).

Jacobsen: What nations matter most in terms of influence on global policy and orientation in politics around the practice of pro-choice medicine?

Backus: I believe the US has a huge influence through its global funding (or non-funding) of public health, including reproductive health programs, particularly in less developed countries needing US funding. MSFC's chapters in Africa, while not being directly funded in any way by government funding, have suffered the loss of key educational partners due to the US Global Gag Rule.

Jacobsen: Who has been the main opposition since the beginning of pro-choice medicine to pro-choice practices?

Backus: For MSFC, the largest barrier has been the extremely hierarchical nature of the medical system. Medical students advocating for controversial or unpopular issues within the medical education system have often paid a career price for their activism (uncomplimentary "Dean's Letters," poor grades, failing to "match" for a residency). Much of this institutional push back is based in an institution's concern about the raising of controversy as opposed to direct anti-choice efforts, but occasionally, coordinated anti-choice efforts contribute to this barrier. For instance, pro-life medical students objecting to an MSFC group's activities as religiously discriminatory, or negative grading of a student's work by a professor who is pro-life.

Jacobsen: What have been their efforts, tactics and strategies, and failures and successes?

Backus: This is too big a question to answer here. I could write a book.

Jacobsen: How can individuals, organizations, policymakers, and others, anticipate the efforts, and tactics and strategies, of pro-life and anti-choice organizations into the future – to reduce their successes and increase our own?

Backus: As we try to do with our student members, pro-choice organizations need to concentrate on building the level of mission commitment within each activist that they will need to carry this effort through the next few decades. This cultivation of mission focus and long-term view among those in the pro-life organizations is largely responsible for their overwhelming success. That is why MSFC focus 20 years out rather than on year by year outcomes.

Jacobsen: How can an organization campaign effectively?

Backus: See my comments above. Long-term strategic focus.

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

Ask Takudzwa 2 – Zimbabwe and Its Discontents, and Supposed Secular Malcontents

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 25, 2019

Takudzwa Mazwienduna is the informal leader of Zimbabwean Secular Alliance. This educational series will explore secularism in Zimbabwe from an organizational perspective. Here we talk about Zimbabwe and secularism.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do you maintain and grow an organization, informally, in the midst of opposition from a dominant religious culture?

Takudzwa Mazwienduna: As Zimbabwean citizens, it is our civic duty to uphold and inquire publicly about the constitution. The Zimbabwean constitution upholds secularism and as long as Christians do not respect this, we will continue inquiring about how they infringe on these positions in our capacity as individual citizens. We are looking to register formally however in order to work with various stakeholders and become effective.

Jacobsen: How have you maintained some internal fortitude in the midst of the work to build a secular community in Zimbabwe through the Zimbabwean Secular Alliance?

Mazwienduna: The secular community has become one big family ever since we established the social media platforms on which we interact. Life long friendships have been forged and we meet up regularly.

Jacobsen: How important are allies in the work to build secularism within Zimbabwe?

Mazwienduna: Allies would make a huge difference considering that the religious establishments we protest against have powerful allies. Our voice as a minority would be magnified and we can make a lot more difference.

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

Mazwienduna: It is always a pleasure Scott.

Interview with Doris Lin – Administrator, "About Animal Rights"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 26, 2019

Doris Lin, an attorney specializing in animal law and the VP of legal affairs for the Animal Protection League of NJ. I hold a degree in Applied Biological Sciences from M.I.T. and have worked for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the US Environmental Protection Agency. I'm a former chair of the NJ State Bar Association's Animal Law Committee, and I am the author of the Wildlife Protection chapter in the NJ Environmental Law Handbook. Here we talk about her life, work, and views.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Just give us a bit of background, what is your story?

Dorin Lin: I'm an animal rights attorney. I work for Animal Protection League of NJ, mainly filing lawsuits against hunting and defending the free speech rights of protesters.

Jacobsen: How did you become involved in non-human rights activism?

Lin: I had always loved animals, and when I was a teenager in NJ when NJ was considering a bill to ban the steel-jawed leghold trap. The article in the local paper mentioned Friends of Animals, so I got in touch with them and ordered pre-printed postcards that I gave out to teachers and friends. I started ordering lots of animal rights pamphlets and leaflets to read and to hand out.

Jacobsen: How did you become an Administrator of "About Animal Rights"?

Lin: Back in 2008, About.com had hundreds of topics and each topic had a Guide and a newsletter. I was subscribed to the vegetarian food newsletter, and one day, I noticed a link at the bottom that said, "Be a Guide." I clicked on it and there was a list of topics they needed Guides for, and one of them was animal rights.

Jacobsen: What are the basics of non-human animal rights?

Lin: Animals have a right to be free from human use and exploitation. They have rights because they are sentient – they are capable of suffering and feeling pain.

Jacobsen: What are the central powerful objections to non-human animal rights? How much are these invalid? How much are these valid?

Lin: I think most people don't realize how their morals are influenced by the culture they were raised in. That's why most Americans think it's OK to eat cows, pigs, and chickens, but are horrified by the idea of eating dogs, horses, and whales. They are full of moral outrage at the thought of eating these other animals.

They don't think of cows, pigs, or chickens as thinking, feeling beings. Obviously, they are thinking, feeling beings. We know that nonhuman animals are capable to emotions and thought because we see it in our pets every day. There's also objective scientific evidence; a conference of neuroscientists signed a declaration that nonhuman animals have consciousness.

Some animal uses are patently frivolous: circuses, fur, cosmetics testing, etc. The excuses for fur and circuses are flimsy, since the purposes are vanity and entertainment.

Companies test products on animals for pure greed and profit: to prove a new ingredient safe for consumers so that it can be patented and sold exclusively by that company. Some people believe that meat is necessary for human health, but this has been debunked over and over, and many studies show the benefits of a vegan/vegetarian diet.

People also sometimes say, "People are more important!" It's a speciesist view, but even if you believe that, the mayor of your town is probably more important than you, but that doesn't mean she has the right to kill you and eat you.

Jacobsen: How much is the respect for the health and wellness of other animals important for the health of ecosystems?

Lin: It's extremely important. All species – plant, animals, microbes, fungi – are part of the ecosystem. It's a complex web that connects all of us, and if you mess up one part of the web, it affects on other parts. Wild animals are important for spreading seeds and fertilizing the ground.

Jacobsen: How much is animal agriculture contributing to anthropogenic climate change or human induced global warming?

How can changes in our eating and the reduction in the suffering of non-human animals through the decrease in animal agriculture help with the health of future generations of people through reductions in the predicted severities of anthropogenic climate change?

Lin: Animal agriculture is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, causes of climate change.

It takes a tremendous amount of land, water, fertilizer, pesticides, antibiotics, energy, and other resources to raise crops to feed to animals for people to eat. The main driver of rainforest deforestation in the Amazon is animal agriculture, because land is being cleared to graze cattle and to grow crops to feed cattle.

Cow flatulence is also a big source of methane, a greenhouse gas. Eating plants directly, instead of feeding plants to animals, is one of the best ways to fight climate change.

Jacobsen: What have been lies made about human rights? What truths dispel them? (I'm assuming that there is a typo in the question, and it should be, "What have been lies made about animal rights?")

Lin: In the 17th century, Rene Descartes, a mathematician and philosopher, said that animals do not feel pain and cry out just like a machine that makes a sound.

Obviously, with science supporting evolution and the knowledge that people are animals, our brains and nervous systems are not so different from other animals. Few people today would doubt that animals are sentient.

The companies that benefit from animal exploitation – fur stores, factory farms, and animal testing facilities – try to paint animal activists as terrorists.

With their high-paid lobbyists and donations to legislators, they've passed the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act in the United States, as well as state laws against animal activism, despite the fact that animal activists have never killed or seriously injured anyone.

White nationalists are stockpiling weapons and going on killing sprees, but these corporations have convinced legislators that the real terrorists are the animal rights activists filming undercover videos of animal abuse.

Jacobsen: If people want to become active, how can they do it? Who can be expected as opposition to this animal rights activism? How can they prepare for such opposition?

Lin: I'm a big fan of local, grassroots groups. Google "animal rights" and the name of your state or province to try to find a local group. You can participate in protests, letter writing campaigns, tabling, boycotts, and other activism. If there is no local animal rights group, you might be able to find a vegan Facebook group for your area.

However, many of these groups are centered around vegan food – finding it, buying it, and making it. It's fun to go to a vegan potluck, and there is definitely value in having vegan friends, but that's not activism. If you're not finding organized activities, I encourage people to start your own group!

The opposition is going to come from the industries that profit from animal exploitation and from

people who are set in their ways. Don't get discouraged. We have an uphill battle against centuries of customs and culture. It's a marathon; not a sprint. I think it's important to find other local animal activists so that you can support each other (see previous mention of vegan potlucks). If you don't know anyone locally, you can find people and groups on social media. I've always loved the Margaret Mead quote, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Jacobsen: Any recommended books or speakers?

Lin: Lauren Ornelas from *Food Empowerment Project*, Christopher Sebastian, Breeze Harper, Aph Ko, Dawn Moncrief from *A Well Fed World*, Carol Adams.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion?

Lin: I think it's important to understand that animal rights is a social justice movement and we do ourselves and the animals a disservice when we distance ourselves from other social justice movements. The environmental movement is a natural ally, but we also need to align ourselves with anti-racism, anti-classism, pro-LGBTQ, feminism, and other movements. It's so counterproductive when I see homophobic and racist messages being used in the animal rights movement. Similarly, we have to address fat shaming and disease shaming within our movement. Vegans come in all shapes and sizes, and, vegans can get sick.

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

Interview with Dr. Norman Finkelstein on Gaza Now

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 26, 2019

<u>Dr. Norman Finkelstein</u>, who should be Professor Finkelstein (if interest, please look into the record of the grotesque denial of tenure to Dr. Finkelstein at DePaul University), remains one of the foremost experts and independent scholars on the Israeli occupation and the crimes against the Palestinians.

Not only known for exemplary independent Scholarship, Finkelstein retains the moral fortitude, mental clarity, and persistence necessary to conduct the research on this topic in spite of the mass of public relations, or massive propaganda, intended to distort the image of the conflict and intentional destruction of his professional academic career. By the loss of one audience, though, he did garner another one.

By these intellectual and ethical standards, especially because of the autonomous existence in both regards, Finkelstein exists as a rare and formidable human being worth careful reading and deep consideration in the written word. His most recent book is considered the magnum opus and is entitled Gaza: An Inquest Into Its Martyrdom.

Here we talk about the right of the Palestinians to extricate themselves from the currently or soon-to-be unlivable conditions with some modicum of contextualization.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: 70% of the current population of Gaza, more than 70 years later, are officially recognized as refugees. Approximately half of the population is comprised of children.

Also, it is one of the most densely populated places on Earth. Most of the water accessible to Palestinians is contaminated. In other words, 97% of the drinking water is unfit for human consumption.

Dr. Sara Roy, Senior Research Scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, describes this as slowly being poisoned by the contaminated water, where this implies about 1 million Palestinian children being poisoned by Israel.

Electricity is available only for some few hours per day. As Palestinians live in what has been called the world's largest open-air prison – most can't leave the Gaza Strip, their conditions have been reported as being unlivable by 2020.

To set the groundwork for some of the other questions, what are some of the other layers to this issue needing explicit statement and repetition in the media?

Dr. Norman Finkelstein: I think that your statement covers a lot of the salient facts. The one fact that it omits – well, I guess, there are two salient facts that it omits – is the problem with exports.

The Gaza economy was largely dependent upon trade of its agricultural goods. Israel has, effectively, banned any exports from Gaza. There are occasional relatively minor and intermittent exceptions.

Once in a while, they will allow Gaza to export some strawberries, but then they will deny Gazans the right.

So, it makes for an unpredictable pattern, which means nobody is going to make contracts even on those limited numbers of exports because it is impossible to know if and when the contracts can be honoured.

So, there is a basic problem of exports. Then there is the other basic problem of what Israel designates dual-use items. Dual-use items are a list of items that Israel claims can be used for both civilian and military purposes.

This list of dual-use items includes, most critically includes, cement. It means Gaza is not able to rebuild from the devastation that Israel inflicted in 2014 during Operation Protective Edge.

It destroyed or made unlivable about 18,000 homes in Gaza. I am not sure what the current status is on the number. I don't have them off the top of my head. The number that they have been able to rebuild of the homes that were totally flattened during Operation Protective Edge.

But the problem of cement. Also, there are various medical devices which are also classified as dual-use, which can't make their way into Gaza.

The long of the short of it is: all of the representative or, I should say, all of the expert organizations monitoring the situation in Gaza, whether it be the International Monetary Fund, or the World Bank, or UNCTAD.

They all concur. There is a consensus. That the principle factor inflicting misery on Gaza is the Israeli blockade, the Israeli siege. Unless that siege is lifted, there is no possibility for any progress Gaza.

Jacobsen: Let's take an example to indicate media reportage bias as well, as you noted elsewhere, in the past, the Hamas 'rockets' being asserted as rockets, but, in fact, being enhanced fireworks.

For those less aware, perhaps, on the style of framing the issue or distorting the truth, or simply lying, how have the cases of the enhanced fireworks or Hamas 'rockets' been reported, in general, in the Western media broadly speaking, in Israeli outlets, and in the other Middle Eastern news and opinion publications?

Finkelstein: Well, the Hamas rockets have effectively been a godsend to Israeli propaganda. Like fireworks on the fourth of July, they are a spectacle, but a spectacle with almost no military consequence.

If you take the case of Operation Protective Edge, Hamas allegedly fired 5,000 rockets at Israel, according to the official Israeli figures. Only 1 house was destroyed and a handful of others incurred some, apparently, minor damage.

This cannot be explained by the allegedly Israeli anti-missile defense system called Iron Dome because Iron Dome only deflected – I guess the official Israeli figure – is about 800 Hamas rockets.

In fact, it is probably much smaller, probably on the order of 50 or so were deflected or disabled. The fact of the matter is: these so-called rockets caused so little damage because they are not rockets.

At least, not rockets in the normal way conceived in the imagination. They are closer to fireworks, enhanced fireworks. Or, I guess, it was *Foreign Affairs* magazine, which called them bottle rockets.

The sort of thing when you were a kid that you would put in a Coke bottle and then set off, and light the fuse and it went into the air.

It is basically what they are. News media like to repeat the figure: several hundred rockets, several hundred this.

Like to repeat the "fear and terror" it induces in Israel, but almost never reports the actual damage, except for the fact that Israel will with a few photos, which are then supposedly representative of the damage done.

They are not really representative. They are exhaustive of the damage done. One photo is supposedly representative of thousands of cases of damage inflicted.

In fact, the one photo is also the only photo. The problem, of course, is the alleged or so-called Hamas rockets have been ballyhooed or deplored by both sides.

So, Israel deplores them as an existential threat. Hamas used to ballyhoo them as a major threat to Israel, echoing the Israeli claim that they were creating an existential threat. Both sides had a mutual stake in inflating the actual damage inflicted by these rockets.

Jacobsen: The attacks on Palestinians appear to become more visible and obvious to more of the wider populace of the world.

There continues to be completely or mostly nonviolent Palestinian protestors, who then are killed, at least, in the double digits in repeated incidents if not more.

In terms of attitudinal stances amongst, for instance, the general American populace and, in particular, American Jewry, how is this wider visibility of the killing of nonviolent protestors changing social attitudes about the Israel-Palestine conflict, as you have written, for example, on a growing disaffection of some American Jews with Israel?

Finkelstein: The major turning points in the Israel-Palestine conflict, as perceived by the broad public. The turning points have correlated or corresponded with the major Israeli bloodlettings among Palestinians, but also neighbouring Arab states.

If you go back, if you were to chronicle or chart the shifts in public opinion, the first major shift comes in 1982, at the time of Israel's major invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. Israel killed between 15,000 and 20,000 civilians and Lebanese, overwhelmingly civilians.

The Israeli massacre in Lebanon climaxed in September with the Sabra and Chatila massacres in the refugee camps. The refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila.

At that point, it was the first major shift in public opinion. It wasn't that a big slice of public opinion, but it was the first significant change in public opinion.

That's when you might say the old left, the communist-oriented left, and the radical wing — maybe radical is too strong, the most militant wing of the anti-war movement. "Anti-war" meaning Vietnam and then its aftermath, what was the aftermath of the anti-war movement.

That sector of public opinion. People like Pete Seeger, Daniel Ellsberg, and assorted others. They came out against Israel publicly for the first time, making a strong statement of condemnation.

And then as time elapsed, the next major change comes in 1987 with the inception of the First Intifada and Israel's massive use of force in order to quell an overwhelmingly non-violent resistance to the Israeli occupation.

Then there was another – so to speak – defection from the Israel camp, another slice of public opinion you would say. Now, inroads are starting to be made in liberal mainstream opinion, not the left fringe but the substantial liberal opinion.

At the time, it would be magazines like *The Nation* magazine, *The New York Review of Books*. You begin to see wavering support for Israel.

The next big shift comes in the Second Intifada, beginning in 2000, when Israel used a massive criminal force in order to suppress the Palestinian resistance, often violent in this case, to the Second Intifada.

The next major turning points come with Operation Cast Lead in 2008/09, which had a very substantial effect on public opinion. And then, most recently, Operation Protective Edge in 2014. Unfortunately, the Great March of Return, a non-violent protest, that begin March 30th of last year, 2018.

They did not have the resonance they should have had in changing public opinion. Ironically, the picture I just chronicled or mapped out has changed somewhat because the major factor now driving alienation from Israel is not the various Israeli bloodlettings.

As I said, the Great March of Return has had a relatively marginal impact on public opinion.

The fact has changed things quite significantly is Benjamin Netanyahu, not just political alliance but his, ideological alliance with the alt-right internationally and, in particular, his ideological, not just political, alliance with Donald Trump.

When I say, "Ideological alliance," it used to be said that if Israel used to make unsavory alliances, say the alliance between Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, the leading Labor Party leaders in Israel, who made alliances with South Africa.

These were said to be alliances of convenience because Israel was so isolated politically. It had to look for allies wherever it could find them. The current alliance between – open embrace more than alliance – Trump and Netanyahu is not an alliance of convenience.

It is an alliance based on shared values, perceptions, shared ideological worldview. It is the worldview of the alt-right. Israel is not even a typical alt-right state, because in most alt-right states there is some alt-left to balance out the alt-right.

We have a Donald Trump and a Bernie Sanders. In Brazil, there is a Bolsonaro, but there is also a Workers' Party on the other side. In the case of Israel, you have an alt-right, and you have an alt-more-right.

There is no center. There is no left. It is an extremely right-wing state, currently – extreme right. Not just at the governmental level, but at the level of society.

Jacobsen: Following from the prior question, and looking into the extensive research into nonviolent protests, writings, and tactics of Mahatma Gandhi by you, why were the Gandhian tactics so effective?

How does this translate into the efficacy of the nonviolent protests and tactics of the Palestinians?

Finkelstein: Well, first of all, it is to the eternal credit of the Palestinians. That they have been able to hold out for so long and persist so long in their non-violent resistance.

It has been going on now for more than a year, the protests, which means they've lasted longer than, in an American context, the Montgomery bus boycott.

Which began with Rosa Parks who refused to sit in the back of the bus, that boycott, which is a crossroads, a milestone, in American history, lasted almost exactly one year.

The Gaza protests have now lasted for a year and one month as of now. No one can deny or gainsay the heroism or the courage of the people of Gaza.

The demonstrations have been overwhelmingly non-violent. Non-violent except for trivial things like throwing rocks or various sorts of implements which barely or do not even reach the Israeli snipers on the other side.

This has been documented, now, in a very authoritative, extensive, impressive UN Human Rights Council report on Gaza, probably the most impressive report that has been written on it, on the conflict thus far.

I would say in terms of its conscientiousness, its precision of language, precision of law. I would say it surpasses significantly the Goldstone Report on Operation Protective Edge. The report by Richard Goldstone, the South African jurist, which created a hysteria in Israel.

The current report is even better and also crosses certain red lines, which human rights organizations have been reluctant to cross up until now. It states explicitly and emphatically that Israel not just used disproportionate force.

Israel did not just use indiscriminate force, but Israel is intentionally targeting Palestinian children, Palestinian medical personnel, Palestinian journalists, Palestinian disabled people. It is intentionally targeting them for murder.

That's an unusual acknowledgement. Although, anybody who has followed the conflict knew this all along. Human rights organizations have been very averse to acknowledging it. Now, this new report does.

The one really regrettable fact of these demonstrations is that they cannot succeed without international support. At some point, Israel is just going to mow down everybody, or wear them away, erode their will.

Unless, these demonstrations have an international resonance, which puts a pressure on Israel to stop the killing. The demonstrations cannot succeed. Unfortunately, the solidarity, the international solidarity, movement with Gaza did not rise to the occasion.

Consequently, it has, basically, been ignored, not just by the mainstream media, which is what one might expect. But they have been ignored by the solidarity movement. That, I think, is politically a disaster.

Jacobsen: In contrast to the nonviolent protest tactics of the Palestinians, what has been the main tactic of the Israelis?

Why does this require a pretext, even strained ones, to prevent poor international public perception, in line with the question on media reportage bias?

Finkelstein: Well, Israel always claims it has a pretext. The pretext this time to the non-violent protest has been two-fold.

First of all, Israel periodically targets Hamas militants or Islamic jihadi militants in the hope of provoking a counterattack with these so-called rockets.

So, Israel can claim it is defending itself. In fact, what it is really hoping to do is end non-violent protests and get the Hamas to use its rockets, so Israel will then have another pretext to go in and slap Gaza.

So long as Hamas does not play along wit this dirty Israeli provocation, Israel has trouble finding a pretext to go into Gaza.

The problem, right now, is that in the absence of media coverage Israel barely even needs a pretext to continue to fire, or to kill and injure, with abandon in Gaza because nobody is paying much attention.

I should add that Israel is highly sensitive to public attention. It has been careful to limit the actual killings and instead have its snipers aim, for example, at the knee caps of Gaza protestors, so as to permanently maim them.

What's called life changing injuries, which is basically a death certificate to those who get these injuries, it means that you're disabled for life. You become a parasite in Gazan society. You have no future.

But these sorts of life changing injuries don't get any media attention because, typically, it just says, "X number of people killed." It may then say, "Wounded," but "wounded" is somewhat or very misleading because these are not just wounds in general.

These are calculated, life changing injuries, permanent mainings for the demonstrators.

Jacobsen: During Operation Cast Lead from 2008-09, on the first day, in the first five minutes, Israel killed 300 Palestinian civilians. How does this compare or contrast with the current killings?

Why is this difference significant, in terms of the fewer numbers of Palestinians killed followed by the greater negative reaction by more of the world?

Finkelstein: Well, a war gives people or gives states *carte blanche* kinds of mass killings, which aren't permissible in non-war situations.

And so, what Israel did in the first day of Operation Cast Lead is just quickly forgotten, whereas when you're engaging in non-violent resistance, it's much more difficult to conceal the magnitude of the horror that is being inflicted.

That is incidentally why the Human Rights Council report was able to state categorically that Israel was intentionally targeting civilians.

Had it been a war situation, and Israel intentionally targets civilians including children during wars, during Operation Protective Edge on July 12th, I think it was, when they killed the four children playing hide-and-seek in broad daylight on the wharf in Gaza.

That was killing children. However, the thing about non-violent protest. You can't claim things like the fog of war and s-h-i-t happens in war. So, that kind of excuse, extenuation, doesn't fly in those sorts of situations.

There was just so much video evidence, and eyewitness evidence, of kids being shot in the head as they were fleeing the perimeter fence of Gaza or disabled people being shot, or a person carrying the flag being shot.

There was no way to make the claim of, "Well, there was somebody shooting me or by that person." All sorts of the usual excuses for Israeli killing.

They just weren't available. So, the human rights organization, in this case the Human Rights Council, commission, was forced or felt free to report the truth.

Namely, that this was, these are, the targeted killings of children, medical personnel, journalists, disabled people, and so forth.

Jacobsen: UNCTAD and the IMF published several reports. The consensus is the proximate cause of the terrible conditions in Gaza emerging from the Israeli blockade with, perhaps, marginal responsibility of Hamas.

How does this violate international law as a form of collective punishment?

Finkelstein: Right, the Israeli claim that it is imposing the blockade as a matter of self-defence. I won't go into the technicalities here. I don't think Israel has any right to self-defence. I'm not going to go into that argument right now.

The simple matter is: how, for example, does preventing the export of strawberries serve a military purpose? How does preventing people who need cancer care from travelling abroad serve a military purpose?

It is quite clear that a purpose or the purpose of the blockade is to punish the people of Gaza by having elected Hamas into office and also to create the incentive, or to incentivize, the people of Gaza to remove the Hamas government and replace it with one that is more pliable to the U.S. and to Israel.

There are aspects of the Israeli blockade of Gaza that couldn't possibly be explained, defended, on so-called military grounds. Even if it had the right of military grounds, which I don't believe it does, but that is a separate question.

Even if it had the right of military self-defence, there are critical aspects of this blockade in particular with the exports, the denial of exports, or the denial of the right to travel for people in need of medical care, which clearly has no relationship to any notion of self-defence.

But are designed to collectively punish the people of Gaza, first, for having elected Hamas into office and, secondly, to incentivize the people of Gaza to rid itself of Hamas, and collective punishment is illegal under international law, I would say in the current case, since Gaza has already crossed the threshold or is approaching the threshold of unliveability.

The blockade has to be classified as a crime against humanity, as a population of 2 million, 1 million of whom are children, are effectively being confined into an area, which is not metaphorically and not poetically but literally, as described by relatively tame economic and human rights organizations, as being unlivable, as a physical fact.

So, if you are confining 2 million people in a *literally* unlivable situation, you're not allowing them to leave. That's consigning them to a slow or fast, depending on the circumstances, death. That has to be described as a crime against humanity.

Collective punishment can be defined as a crime against humanity in certain situations. The International Criminal Court has described it as a crime against humanity. I would say in the case of Gaza, right now, that it has crossed that threshold.

Jacobsen: Given the mostly child population, the entrapped locale and densely populated area, the urgency of unliveable conditions by 2020, and the right to extricate themselves, instead of idealized or fantasy 'solutions,' what are pragmatic steps for the Palestinians to remove themselves from this context, including removal of the blockade?

What would be the first and foremost step for the international support networks to assist the Palestinians in these practical steps? The Palestinians who are giving their lives.

Finkelstein: The last question, to me, is pretty straightforward. The answer has to be the international community has to force Israel to lift the blockade and put it in accordance with international law and enable the people of Gaza, who are currently being strangled, being throttled, to breathe.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Dr. Finkelstein.

Finkelstein: Okay, best of luck.

Ask Professor Rosenthal 2 – By the Numbers, Boys and Girls: Happenstance and Chance of the Everyday

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 27, 2019

<u>Dr. Jeffrey S. Rosenthal</u> is a Professor of Statistics at the University of Toronto. Here we talk about the statistics, life, and quality of life.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are some everyday examples of statistics, chance, and luck in action?

Professor Jeffrey Rosenthal: There are so many! Randomness arises whenever we're not sure what will happen next. Will it rain? Will we get a job? Will the stock price increase? Who will win the election? Will we fall in love?

All of these questions can be modelled, in various ways, as a random phenomenon where we don't know the actual outcome, we just know various probabilities and can try to base our actions and understandings on that.

Jacobsen: How could knowledge of the nature of chance improve our livelihoods and quality of life – not simply thinking critically about bunk claims?

Rosenthal: An understanding of randomness — what I call the "probability perspective" — allows us to make better decisions in many ways. We can avoid worrying about very low-probability bad events, like airplane crashes or kidnappings by strangers.

We can stop counting on low-probability successes like winning the lottery jackpot. We can also decide whether to walk or wait for the bus, whether to accept medical treatment, and so on.

Best of all, we can better understand the world around us, such as news items claiming dramatic "similarities" of two long-lost relatives, or great "surprise" at certain coincidences which were bound to happen eventually by chance alone.

In short, the better we understand randomness, and the more probability perspective we have, the better we can understand and react to our uncertain world.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Professor Rosenthal.

Interview with James – Toronto Pig Save and The Save Movement

Scott Douglas Jacobsen April 28, 2019

Here we talk with James of Toronto Pig Save and The Save Movement about farmed animals, ethics, diets, cruelty, and more.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did you get into activism?

James: I got into activism about five years ago. I had been vegan for a few years and as time passed I felt more and more that being vegan wasn't enough and I had a moral duty to get active to try and stop animal exploitation. I had seen Toronto Pig Save activists bearing witness to pigs en route to Quality Meat Packers, a now-defunct slaughterhouse in downtown Toronto, and decided to join them.

Jacobsen: What is your main form of activism?

James: My main form of activism is bearing witness. I think its the most effective and transformational form of activism for non-vegans and vegan alike. Meeting the victims, coming face to face with animals about to be murdered is incredibly impactful. It brings an urgency and realism to the reality of animal agriculture in such a powerful and visceral way.

Jacobsen: For The Save Movement, it focuses on farmed animals. What is the fundamental ethic here?

James: We focus on farmed animals as they are the most exploited, but we are against all forms of animal exploitation. We also have whale Saves, lab animal Saves, fur animal Saves. Recently we have expanded our Climate Save groups and now have over 100 locations around the world, demonstrating the link between animal agriculture and the climate crisis and deforestation. This year we will also be starting Health Save groups to focus on the health consequences of eating animals and the health benefits of a vegan diet. Fundamentally, animals don't belong to us and aren't ours to exploit or use in any way.

Jacobsen: What is the general treatment of farmed animals?

James: Farmed animals are treated abysmally all around the world. They are abused, tortured, raped and murdered. Animals are seen as products and objects to profit from, not sentient beings. So their interests and well being are not prioritized nor even considered.

Jacobsen: Some modern non-health experts and YouTube personalities have been promoting all-meat diets and ketogenic diets. Why does veganism follow from the work of The Save Movement? Why are all-meat and ketogenic diets all-of-the-sudden moderately ascendant among North Americans?

James: Fad diets are part of our culture, especially in North America and the West in general. Veganism at its core is about not exploiting animals and living a cruelty-free life as much as possible, not a diet choice.

Jacobsen: With reference to valid and legitimate sources, what are the health outcomes, in general, for all-meat and ketogenic diets compared to veganism?

James: Vegan diets are far healthier than non-vegan diets which cause a whole host of health issues. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and Nutrition Facts have in-depth articles about the health consequences of non-vegan diets and the benefits of vegan diets. pcrm.orgnutritionfacts.org

Jacobsen: When do vegan dietitian, or simply vegan, claims become invalid and jump past the evidence?

James: Not sure what claims you mean and don't want to hypothesize.

Jacobsen: For those interested in becoming involved in the reduction of unnecessary harm to farmed animals, what are some ways in which they can become involved with the donation of time, money, professional networks, and so on?

James: The most impactful thing an individual can do reduce unnecessary harm to animals is to go vegan and get active.

Jacobsen: Secular individuals tend to focus on the naturalistic. The ability to think and feel become important for them. For pigs, how much can pigs feel and cogitate? How does this compare to other non-human animals?

James: Pigs are intelligent animals that form bonds with other pigs and have higher cognitive ability than dogs and three-year-old humans. Their intelligence, however, isn't relevant. They are sentient, experience emotions, feel pain, and like all animals want to live and we have no right to exploit and kill them.

Jacobsen: Skeptics may not accept the ideas of organic food or local food versus their contrasts. However, more plants and whole grains in the diet will probably be important to them. According to the most reliable sources (e.g., the Mayo Clinic, Health Canada, the World Health Organization, and so on), what are the benefits of a diet higher in plants and whole grains? What are the potential drawbacks?

James: Organic, free-range or local animals still end up getting murdered, no matter how well they are treated whilst alive. Vegan diets are far healthier than non-vegan diets which cause a whole host of health issues. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and Nutrition Facts have in-depth articles about the health consequences of non-vegan diets and the benefits of vegan diets. pcrm.orgnutritionfacts.org

Jacobsen: What is the purpose of the erection of glass walls in slaughterhouses as advocated by Toronto Pig Save?

James: The 'glass walls' theory was popularized by Paul McCartney who claimed 'If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian.' The reality of animal agriculture is kept hidden from the public and thinking being this quote is that if people could actually see the suffering and murder they are supporting, they would choose to stop supporting it. By bearing witness, people are removing the 'walls' and seeing the truth.

Jacobsen: What have been the impacts in other locations if this has been a tactic advocated and practiced by other organizations?

James: We have over 600 Animal Save groups around the world now and work closely with other organizations. Bearing witness has been embraced by other groups and we have had joint

vigils with groups such as DXE and PETA. Ingrid Newkirk, president and founder of PETA has attended vigils in Toronto.

Jacobsen: What are the potential downsides of this tactic, as some may see this as dramatic?

James: The reality is that animals in their billions are being completely unnecessarily exploited and murdered every single day. We are conditioned from infancy to think this is normal, natural, and necessary so some people may think it is dramatic to stand up for them. However, in truth, it is none of those things and being active is a moral duty for those who have broken the disconnect. Even if people are initially disparaging when they see us, the seeds are planted, and it may encourage them to question their beliefs and make changes.

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

License and Copyright

License



In-Sight Publishing by <u>Scott Douglas Jacobsen</u> is licensed under a <u>Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.</u>

Based on a work at https://www.canadianatheist.com/.

Copyright

© 2012-2020 by Scott Douglas Jacobsen and *In-Sight Publishing* 2012-2020. Unauthorized use and/or duplication of this material without express and written permission from this site's author and/or owner is strictly prohibited. Excerpts and links may be used, provided that full and clear credit is given to Scott Douglas Jacobsen and *In-Sight Publishing* with appropriate and specific direction to the original content.