



BOOK OF STUFF 10

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Book of Stuff 10

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MEDIUM (PERSONAL)

Shining Light Upon the Hill of Songs: A Morning Star's Waning, Singing in Descent

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 10, 2019

Prominent actress, Ellen Page, has been more outspoken, recently, about what she sees as injustices, then simply speaks directly on the subject matter. Some of these can include environmental issues, and hateful rhetoric and leadership or racism.

The Progressive Secular Humanist wrote on this calling out of an American actor, Chris Pratt, in an interview with Stephen Colbert. The interview focused on sheep, sheering of sheep, and a diet coming from the Book of Daniel in the Bible called the Daniel Fast. Pratt said that this diet made him feel good.

As reported, “According to its website, the Daniel Fast is ‘based on the fasting experiences of the Old Testament Prophet,’ and serves to help people ‘draw nearer to God.’” Always, always, there should be a “maybe” followed by a comma and a space — and other conceptual necessities — preceding bold pseudohistorical statements like the one there, as in: “...maybe, the Daniel Fast is based on the fasting experiences of the purported Old Testament ‘Prophet’...”

Pratt described to Colbert how this was, in essence, their church’s Lent, to bridge the conceptual gap with Colbert, who is a practicing Roman Catholic Christian. The diet consisted of no meat, no sugar, and no alcohol. The interviewed continued in this chummy way.

Page went on social media to critique Pratt because of the anti-LGBTQ nature of the church that Pratt takes part in now; in fact, Page, at the same time, was critiquing the soft interviewing of Colbert.

A statement (2015) from the church, Hillsong Church, stated, “God’s word is clear that marriage is between a man and a woman.”

Thus, the traditional view is the one purportedly endorsed by a supposed god, where this god is displeased and looks down upon gay ‘lifestyles’ and gay marriage.

That is to say, Hillsong Church views homosexuality as a social lifestyle rather than a reality; an innate tendency within the human species. Why? Because God did not intend things this way, likely. He intended marriage between male and female without homosexuality in the cards.

To their credit, the statement noted a welcoming attitude to everyone coming into the church. However, they do not affirm all — what they non-scientifically assert as — “lifestyles”:

Put clearly, we do not affirm a gay lifestyle and because of this we do not knowingly have actively gay people in positions of leadership, either paid or unpaid. I recognise this one statement alone is upsetting to people on both sides of this discussion, which points to the complexity of the issue for churches all over the world.

Discrimination in marriage, regressive in social outlook, and bias in hiring all-at-once; this is Hillsong Church circa 2015, where this extends to the non-Australian extensions in which Pratt and other American celebrities take part now. Other promoters of the Hillsong Church have been “Justin Bieber, Selena Gomez and the Kardashians.”

America is coming to the head of a huge culture war. One of the linchpins, among many, is the issue of LGBTQ+ acceptance within their society or not. This callout by Page will be among a number of others, as this continues to be just below the surface of public consciousness.

As with the many explosions in American history, the outcome will be further repression of the LGBTQ+ community or further acceptance of them. Hillsong Church is based on Australia but boasts over 100,000 members worldwide. It is a massive church, where the lead pastor, Brian Houston, has been embroiled in media ploys to try to clear the name of infamous misogynist pastors including Mark Driscoll of defunct Mars Hill Church.

The Hillsong Church stands against stem cell research, abortion, supports Creationism, and views homosexuality as against the teachings of the Bible but Hillsong Church, itself, does not, at the same time, condemn homosexuals. This exists along the lines of “hate the sin but not the sinner” seen in some weaker arguments in the Pentecostal arsenal for social control of homosexuals and theological grounding for marital and sociocultural discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community.

The bottom line is that Houston does not think the Bible can be unwritten or rewritten, as it is the fundamental delivery from He on High, the Creator of the Universe. Pastor Chad Veach of Zoe Church — Pratt’s pastor and church — modeled everything after Hillsong Church. These are not complicated moral issues. These are not complex questions about the nature of human relations. These are basic, elementary even, moral and ethical questions.

Do you, as a leader of a community, want to include sexual orientation and gender identity minorities into your communities as full members or simply as advocates of Christ in the church as members but those members who simply are not permitted the possibility to be real equals based on the contents of the holy text within the fundamentalist Pentecostal reading of the Bible? In short, do you want to include homosexuals in the community as full participants or not?

If you don’t, then you do not believe in equality for all, as in the case of marriage only for heterosexuals in binary units or a male and a female united in the eye’s of God as a husband and wife. If you do, then you believe in the inclusion of these members of the community, not as honorary badges of marginal progressivism.

Furthermore, if the latter, it would be an interesting reflection and observation that the progressive secular communities have already been working on this issue for some time without the need to pray on it, to read the holy text for answers, to go to a higher religious authority or body for detailed theological exegesis, but only to the basic instincts, when unencumbered by too much dogma, for inclusion, general honesty, and compassionate community-building based on mutual respect and camaraderie.

It becomes a basic ethical fact. Either LGBTQ2IA+ are included in the subculture or not. If not, please explain the reason. Because, the reasons, typically, are amoral if not immoral and based on the tacit understanding of a purported holy text in which they may be identified spiritually as equal — whatever that means — but, in the concrete world, the nitty-gritty of everyday life, simply get left out as equals compared to the heterosexual communities. Pratt, Houston, Veach, et al, seem to have failed this base moral question. Pratt et al in terms of implicit endorsement, e.g., attendance and financial in terms of tithing; Houston and Veach in terms of preaching and theology. Page is on point; I look forward to reading her next one.

Get flipping.

Ask Dr. Robertson 5 — Self-Actualization, Boys, and Young Males: Solution:Problem::Hammer:Nail

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 11, 2019

Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson is a Registered Doctoral Psychologist with expertise in Counselling Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Human Resource Development. He earned qualifications in Social Work too.

His research interests include memes as applied to self-knowledge, the evolution of religion and spirituality, the Aboriginal self's structure, residential school syndrome, prior learning recognition and assessment, and the treatment of attention deficit disorder and suicide ideation.

In addition, he works in anxiety and trauma, addictions, and psycho-educational assessment, and relationship, family, and group counseling. Please see Ask Dr. Robertson 1 — Counselling and Psychology, Ask Dr. Robertson 2 — Psychotherapy, Ask Dr. Robertson 3 — Social and Psychological Sciences Gone Wrong, and Ask Dr. Robertson 4 — Just You and Me, One-on-One Counselling, as these are the previous sessions in this educational series. Here we talk about self-actualization.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Famously, so famous, in fact, as to become a common phrase indicative of common sense wisdom — which, as one may joke about ‘common sense,’ may be uncommon sometimes and other times not-so-wise, the late Abraham Maslow, American Psychologist, remarked on the existence of problems and tools to solve them:

I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail.

Dr. Philip Zimbardo, Professor Emeritus at Stanford University, and others — including Dr. Warren Farrell, who speaks in a pace and tone so as not to offend even the fly on the wall, for content reasons, obviously — continue to focus on some overlooked issues for males, young males and boys in particular; where as a collective, interrelated culture, these become issues for us, too. Maslow constructed the hierarchy of needs in the 1943 paper entitled A Theory of Human Motivation.

Zimbardo, who specializes in the psychology of evil (Stanford Prison Experiment in experiment and Abu Ghraib in reality, though this experiment came under more critical scrutiny, recently) and time perspective (e.g., living, mentally speaking, in the past, the present, or future), spoke on young men and boys since the early 2010s right into the present.

In particular, Zimbardo spoke on the failure of some boys and young men in multiple domains of life, where mainstream cultures — multinationally speaking — demand certain levels of performance and expect achievement of specific milestones by culturally affirmed ages for social approval. If not, then cue the epithets and societal reproval.

It is not an all-or-nothing evaluation, but it is a change in the ratio of the boys and young men succeeding compared to previous generations on average — and, especially, in

contrast to the wonderful rise of girls and women. It becomes a dual-facet phenomenon of decline for boys and young men and incline for girls and young women with higher-order analysis implications, in time and in persistence of culture in bounded geography. **Zimbardo** reflected on the failures, by his estimation, as indicative of a hijacking or hacking of the hierarchy of needs by pornography, video games, and fatherlessness/(male-)mentorlessness — in part.

That is to say, with the self-fulfillment and psychological needs removed from the hierarchy of needs or ignored by the boys and young men, this left, at least, pornography, video games, and mentorlessness as central pillars in the decline of self-actualization and psychological needs, in boys and young men.

In the end, **Zimbardo** argues the result becomes a context in which young men and boys find themselves fulfilled as purely safety-and-physiological-needs-based beings, while also creating, in his research and assertions, i.e., not formally accepted by the academic psychological community in the DSM-5, “arousal addictions”: a psychological mode of a move towards pleasure and drift, or shift, away from pain in every life dynamic with a consistent need for novelty, which is an addiction for similar hyperstimuli with perpetual novelty, e.g., pornography and video games, as opposed to the same hyperstimuli, e.g., cocaine and gambling.

Of course, as a side remark, **Dr. Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D., American Psychologist and Physician**, describes endocrine disruptors and educational system changes as additional factors in this.

No planning, no contingencies, no notions of the future, no orientation towards larger life goals, and little or no incentive to move out of this hedonistic, presentist mental state. Did **Maslow** predict this psychological orientation of young men and boys? If so, how? Did anyone (else)?

Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson: Your pre-amble certainly covers a lot of ground, Scott! The short answer as to whether **Maslow** predicted the current psychological orientation of young men and boys is “no.” He was interested in individual as opposed to collective psychological development. On the other hand, his hierarchy of needs may be applied to such developments.

There is a lot of evidence that males in modern Euro-American cultures are not doing well. Males, on average, die younger. Male unemployment is increasing with large numbers of younger males considered virtually unemployable, yet 97% of workplace deaths are men. Seventy percent of graduates in Canadian universities are women. Male suicide rates are four times that of women. Men are more likely to suffer from addictions, be incarcerated and be victims of violent crime. Eighty percent of homeless are men. Things have gotten worse for men since ex-feminist **Warren Farrell** wrote his book two and a half decades ago. From a **Maslow** hierarchy of needs perspective, things have not been going well, and part of that can be attributed to the influence of feminism.

Sax, whom you also referenced, in a brilliant analysis of kindergarten curricula in the United States, said that the curricula had been changed in preceding decades to conform to girl’s normative development. Specifically, he said that kindergartens had come to emphasize verbal skills which developmentally favour girls at that age. Had kindergartens emphasized spatial skills then boys would have been favoured. The result of this gynocentric curricula is that boys

are more likely to experience frustration in their early schools, like school less, and more frequently experience failure. If female normative development and behaviour is set as normative across society, then boys and men will be disadvantaged. But that is only part of the story.

Using qualitative methods, I was able to demonstrate that a diverse sample of Canadian men have experienced harsh stigma as a result of their sex. Stigma is the imputation of characteristics to a class of people that renders them unfit for certain social roles. The men were viewed as a threat to others or irresponsible with respect to family responsibilities simply because they were men. As a result, they were judged as unfit, or less fit, in their roles as parents or as employees in specific occupations despite a lack of evidence of any wrongdoing. We see this stigma in society with notions of “toxic masculinity” where guilt does not have to be proven, it is assumed. Thus, even when men overcome disadvantages built into education, they remain at a disadvantage. The alienation of fathers from their families, in large part because of stigma, compounds the problem because boys, raised by single parent mothers, are less likely to have effective role models matching their gender and they are more likely to experience addictions, incarceration and suicide.

So, as Zimbardo has argued, many young men are dropping out. They are not competing for careers. They are not establishing families. They are not contributing meaningfully to society. They are occupying themselves with short term gratification. Maslow argued that until self-esteem needs are met, people are more preoccupied with meeting those needs than pursuing self-actualization. If a group of people are disadvantaged in education and suffer stigma for being a member of their group, it could be expected that in accepting the dominant society’s normative view, they suffer low genderized self-esteem. Zimbardo’s famous prison experiment showed definitively that people tend to become the roles societies set for them. The scary implication of this is that many of these young men could become the “toxic masculine” stereotype feminists have set for them. But I think there is another way of looking at this.

About three decades before Maslow built his famous pyramid, Alfred Adler said that all humans are born with a “striving for perfection” which is similar to Maslow’s idea of self-actualization. Those who give up this striving are people who are discouraged and this describes those young men who are dropping out. We need to combat society’s message to boys that they are both bad and failures and we need to reintroduce the striving for goodness.

Robertson’s article on Male Stigma can be found at: https://www.hawkeyeassociates.ca/images/pdf/academic/Male_Stigma.pdf

Jacobsen: Following from the previous question, what therapeutic methods, in a professional setting — group and one-on-one, work with the young men and boys, who, by standard cultural expectations, continue to fail at, probably, increasing rates?

Robertson: In 2012 I attended a workshop on how to counsel men at a Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association annual convention. The presenters were both women one of whom asked, with wide eyed innocence, how many of the attendees, who were overwhelmingly women, had actually counselled a man. Fewer than half the workshop participants raised their hands. The workshop then proceeded with a review of statistics on how few men seek psychotherapy, how men experience depression and suicide ideation less but nonetheless commit suicide at higher rates, and how men sublimate their mental health needs through alcohol, anger, and violence. The prescription of the presenters was that men need to learn how to admit their

failings and seek help; they need to be in touch with their feelings more and make themselves “vulnerable” by discussing those feelings; and they need to find allies and build support systems. In short, they need to become more like women.

The suggestions of these female facilitators are not totally wrong. Many men benefit from honing these skills; but I would argue that many women would benefit from learning skills in which men tend to more easily excel. The problem with the paradigm that was presented at this workshop is exactly the problem Sax found with gynocentric kindergarten curricula — it sets up female developmental experience as normative to which both sexes should aspire.

The dominant themes in psychotherapy have always been gyno-normative, even when most of the practitioners were male. For example, Freud’s patients were all female (and rich females at that), and it was on his experience with them that he based his theories. It is probably no coincidence that the psychoanalysis he developed consists of symbolism, dream interpretation, random thoughts, free associations and fantasies in a process that can take years. In contrast, the male approach is to define a problem and solve it. Sometimes this involves setting aside one’s emotions so that rational processes are better able to take charge. My experience with men is that they do not want to be in therapy for a long time. Albert Ellis’ Rational Emotive Therapy makes sense for many men although women may equally benefit from this approach.

I don’t mean to recapitulate John Grey’s Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus thesis. A non-sexist psychotherapy will treat each person as a culture of one with the therapist setting out to learn that culture; however, we need to recognize that there are certain tendencies that may be culturally or genetically driven. Sexist psychotherapy occurs when the normative experience of one sex is set as the norm for both. For example, the presenters at the “How to Counsel Men” workshop I just cited were mystified as to how it was that men were far more likely to commit suicide than women but were far less likely to suffer from depression. It did not occur to them that the American Psychological Association defines depression using the female normative experience. Male symptoms that differ from the female expression are not recognized, and I submit this is one reason why men are under diagnosed with this condition.

It is not at all clear that men’s mental health needs will receive serious attention any time soon. The APA Guidelines for the Psychological Practice with Men and Boys released last year, attempts to link traditional masculinity to racism, ageism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism, and this, we are told, results in “personal restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or self.” The unsubstantiated suggestion is made that men commit higher levels of intimate partner violence and are estranged from their children because they lack the will or ability to have positive involvement in healthy family relationships. Psychologists are cautioned about believing their male clients who protest their innocence because, in the words of the APA, “Male privilege tends to be invisible to men.”

I think we should consider the possibility that men do not seek counselling or therapy because they do not see counsellors and therapists as sympathetic to their experiences and the APA guidelines fail to dispel this perception. This should not be seen as an indictment against all therapists. Jordan Peterson’s “Twelve Steps” are based on practices that are common to Rational Emotive and Cognitive Behavioural therapies, and he expressed surprise that his approach has been overwhelmingly endorsed by young men because those approaches are gender neutral. I think his experience demonstrates that men are willing to seek help for their mental health issues if the helpers are seen to be sympathetic to their lived experience.

My advice to men who are interested in psychotherapy is to interview a number of psychotherapists before settling on one. Ensure that the therapist you choose is sympathetic to your needs and has an approach with which you feel comfortable. I think most therapists would feel comfortable answering such questions, and if they do not, you do not want to use the services of that therapist.

Jacobsen: Recalling a remark by Sax, he noted, after the age of 30, no reliable intervention — inasmuch as his research and professional practice work are concerned — for the aforementioned failure, in terms of steerage back onto the high seas of normal cultural life. He states, according to recent research on the architecture of the brain, an adult female is aged 22 and an adult male is aged 30.

Robertson: Neuropsychology is not my field; however, this sounds like an old idea that girls mature faster than boys. I will rely on Susan Harter on this who did a meta-analysis and concluded that the frontal lobes normally complete their development around age 25 for both sexes. She published this in her 2012 book, and there may be subsequent research of which I am not aware. On the other hand, Sax is on solid ground in contending that there are inherited sex-linked differences with respect to personalities, drives and certain aptitudes although it should be remembered that when discussing such differences, we are talking about averages and that knowing a person's sex will not reliably tell us anything about any individual person's personality or aptitudes. In any case, we are not born with a blank slate as Steven Pinker classically articulated in his book of that name, and on that point I think Sax is on very solid ground scientifically.

The 1950s and 60s popular notion that girls mature faster than boys were grounded in a number of observations that included girls verbal and social development, and the fact that young women were often ready to settle down and raise a family by their late teens. Young men, on the other hand, were often more interested in things than people and would rather explore and experiment than settle down and raise a family. The related conclusions regarding maturity was again grounded in a gynonormative perspective. We now know that different lifestyles and experiences can affect the brain's structure such that male curiosity, if allowed expression, will result in a strengthening of relevant parts of the brain. Neo-natal scarcity can also lead to phenotypical gene expression that may be adaptive in a world of grinding poverty but are maladaptive in the modern context. Sax may have been thinking of this research in putting limits on when profitable interventions may be undertaken. Recent research has debunked the idea that the brain loses all plasticity by age 30, and in any case, I have helped many adults past middle age to lead satisfying lives after having had a career of dysfunctionality.

Jacobsen: Looking at the last two questions, if we look at the short, medium, and long term futures of men and, thus, in part, societies, what will be the outcomes for those who begin to succeed, and those who continue to fail, by the standard cultural expectations in Canada? What will be the outcomes for the Canadian culture if the trends lean towards further failure or further success — as defined before? For example, Sax reflects on the work by Professor David D. Gilmore, Professor of Anthropology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, with the likely dissipation and replacement, as an assessment and not a judgment of Gilmore, of secular English-speaking culture in North America, and, in fact, elsewhere, because of the lack of strong bonds across generations and the current cultures with young men and boys on one failure, and girls and young women on another standard success, trajectory, where these sub-cultures in larger Canadian society will not

reproduce themselves for a variety of reasons and, therefore, will undergo steady replacement by other sub-cultures enacting the behavioral, communal, familial, and mating patterns indicative of those who have endured in previous generations for millennia, e.g., the Navajo, the Chinese, the Jewish, and so on.

Robertson: Again, there is a lot packed into your question. I would predict that some men will continue to succeed and they will assume the position of alpha males. I predict that large numbers of men will continue to fail, in part due to societal structures that lead to this result, and in part due to their own state of personal anomy flowing from a breakdown in the intergenerational transmission of values. I would argue, however, that reproduction below replacement levels is occurring worldwide and cannot be attributed solely or even primarily to events unique to Euro-American cultures but seem to be correlated with higher levels of educational opportunity available to women that allow for alternate avenues to self-actualization besides the mother archetype. I don't think a low birth rate is necessarily a bad thing, but I am concerned about male roles in this new culture.

With the words "alpha male" my mind went immediately to the Canadian prime minister who may or may not be prototypical. Alpha males operate by different rules than are available to ordinary males. Feminists in Trudeau's cabinet like Chrystia Freeland and Jane Philpott gave Mr. Trudeau a pass on substantiated allegations of a past sexual assault while applauding the expulsion from the Liberal caucus backbench members who faced unproven allegations of sexual assault. This would be an example of how rules between classes of men differ in the new society. The problems men who are not alpha face are either invisible or ignored. Even though three times as many male aboriginal men are missing or murdered as compared to aboriginal women, a Canadian inquiry into the problem excluded consideration of the men. When the government announced that Syrian refugees would be admitted, single males were specifically excluded from refugee status. When foreign aid increases were announced, agencies receiving the aid had to agree that none of it would go to men. I do not think the majority of men can expect much consideration from such feminized alpha males.

One problem faced by the majority of men is we do not normally confide in and support other men. I have been part of that problem. In 1969 I marched with Women's Liberation to protest the "Saskatoon Club." This was a club for well-to-do men in the city of Saskatoon. Men got to relax, play pool, discuss business and politics, and enter into mentoring relationships without the perceived distraction of women. We succeeded in opening it up to women. About three years later a succession of women rose at a meeting of Women's Liberation to state that there were women present who felt intimidated by the presence of men. They politely asked the men present, who numbered about a quarter of the group, to leave, and we did so without protest. The result is that there was no net gain in inter-sex cooperation. The difference involved a shifting of gender specific networking and mentoring capacity. Ordinary men to this day remain largely unorganized.

The lack positive male self-identity can be traced to an intergenerational fail in the transmission of values. This fail began long before the advent of feminism. With the Industrial revolution men were forced to work in factories for 12 to 16 hours per day six days per week. Men became absentee parents whose contribution to the family was largely as a "good provider." Mothers raised their children but necessarily gave them a woman's perspective. This division of labour became a cultural norm, maintained long after working hours were reduced. Most men still measured their self-worth by their ability to be that good provider for their families differing to

women in matters of child-rearing. But now, if men work hard and achieve financial success they are told that they are the recipients of unearned male privilege. Some men are saying, “Why bother?” I think the appeal of people like Peterson is that he has given them a reason to bother that transcends current ideological constraints, and that reason has to do with the development of personal integrity. In a sense, he is reaching out intergenerationally, filling a need in building positive male identities, as I also hope to do in this interview. Thank you for the opportunity.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Dr. Robertson, once more.

Killer Trigger Warning-Disclaimer: Mike Drop on Christianity

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 11, 2018

BET conducted an interview with the rapper Killer Mike, recently. In the interview, as outspoken as Mike has been for years, he may have caused a bit of a ruckus with some commentary on Christianity. His baseline argument: Christianity does more harm than good for black people.

In an episode of Trigger Warning With Killer Mike, which is on Netflix, there was further exploration of the world of African-American communities and the cultural taboos within it.

This particular episode covered the belief in a Jesus who was European, Caucasian, or simply 'white.' A Middle East holy figure who was white, think about it. Killer Mike considers this an idea needing deconstruction: directly and without recourse to apologetics. The episode was entitled "Church of Sleep."

As reported, "Using 'Church of Sleep,' a recent Q&A with the Atlanta MC further examines white Jesus, the African Diaspora, ancestral devotion, economic self-sufficiency, the current state of affairs for Black people, and more..."

In the interview, Killer Mike reported on how he viewed African-Americans as imprisoned with the image of a white Jesus and that they are in the "bondage of Christianity."

"What I ended up discovering is that not only is that image oppressive because it denies the identity of myself — all of it hurts the followers," Killer Mike explained, "Personally, white Jesus is not good for me. And for my community, it's not good for them. So I went in with the [intention] of destroying this image, a very patriarchal and racist image."

In the process of this rapid deconstruction of the image, Mike created a new church entitled the Church of Sleep, hence the title of the episode. He noted prayer simply, for him and his family, is talking to oneself and finding their own inner divinity.

Mike has a shrine devoted to his grandmother and mother with an entire prayer room within the household, where there are women divinity figures.

Astutely, Mike stated, "People find community and stability in religious practices and churches, so I get it. Like, I still go to church. I will go to church with my children and their mothers. 'Cause the sense of community and fellowship — I get that. I ain't giving no money at the end. I don't buy or need to buy loyalty to talk to God."

He noted how he has been questioning the faith, asking critical and probing questions, for years, since about the age of 15. Mike stated that he studied religion and philosophy at Morehouse too.

"Without the African diaspora, particularly the East and Horn and formerly South Sudan — without South Sudan, you wouldn't have religion. You wouldn't have Abrahamic religions. All of those religions borrow from folklore, from mythology," Killer Mike explained, "You wouldn't have — without the Orishas of Africa, you wouldn't have Greek gods. So without a basis of calling out the attributes of gods of different names and having different powers, the

Greeks would never set up what became figures like Zeus and Hercules, so I'm cool with everything that came before those."

He noted a binary position or set of responses to his critical inquiry. Either the African-American community likes the message or not. By Mike's thinking on the issue, the indoctrination into Christianity and, in this particular consideration, into the mythology of a white Middle Eastern Jew named Jesus begins at age 4, approximately.

Killer Mike stated, "You're put in a school or nursery or something, and you're not free anymore because you have to agree to the structure of that reality. But before that, your imagination is alive. You're already in tune with God. You're already talking to the air. No one knows who you are talking to. You're walking out into the grass, so that's appreciating God to me. So to me after that, you kind of agree to the system and you spend the rest of your life trying to un-agree and sometimes you don't."

BET's interviewer was an intriguing person, to say the least. They asked good questions, direct queries getting at the heart of it. They asked about the path to personal enlightenment, of which Killer Mike recommended paying closer attention to the internal voice for them. As a youngster growing up, as with most gifted young people, he simply began to question the foundational belief structures handed down to him. He continued to disbelieve it. Now, he is one among many leading a charge of, at a minimum, critical thinking about Christianity and, at least, a white Jesus in African-American communities.

Ask Mark 1 — Somethin' About Nothin': The Nones Ain't Nothin'

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 12, 2019

Mark Gibbs is an independently educated nonbeliever, who has some interesting and precise thoughts about the terminology in the survey data presented to the unbelieving community over the years. Here, in this series, we will explore some of the content, starting with the term “Nones.”

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You have been independently and intermittently researching the different terms and definitions of the formal and informal non-religious for ten years. One particular term does not sit well with you. It does not sit well with others. It is the “Nones”. Why this word?

Mark Gibbs: I can't honestly claim that what I've done could be reasonably called “research”, but having written several times over the years about the demographics of atheism in Canada, and reporting on numerous studies and surveys about Canadian atheists' beliefs or characteristics, that term is a bit of a pet peeve of mine. As near as I've been able to trace its origins, it seems to have literally started out as a joke.

The story I've heard is that in 2001, while doing the second American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), Professor Barry Kosmin noted the massive growth in the number of people who did not affiliate with any religion — they'd almost doubled in size since the previous survey from 1990 (8.2% to 14.1%; these are US numbers). He realized there wasn't really a term for this group — they were the “No religion” category, but what would you call them? “No-religionists”?

“Nonreligious” was a possibility. So was “non-faith” and “non-affiliated.”

But Kosmin rejected all of these. The “non” part bothered him. “Non-affiliated” would be like calling people “non-white,” he said. “We didn't want to suggest that ‘affiliated’ was the norm, and every one else was an ‘other.’”

“Nomenclature,” he added, “is quite important in these things.”

So he had good intentions, but ultimately he came up with the term “none”: short for “none of the above”. The logic was that if people were presented with a list of religious denominations, those who were not part of any religion would choose “none of the above”.

“It began as a joke,” he said, “but now, like many of these things, it has taken on its own life.”

It's really important that we clarify what “None” actually means, because there is a lot of confusion about it. “None” does not mean “not religious”, or “having no religion”. “None” means specifically having no religious affiliation. Surveys like ARIS and population censuses usually don't ask about your beliefs; they usually ask a question that looks something like this: “Which religion or denomination do you identify with?” Note that the question is about affiliation, not belief. StatCan actually spells that out pretty clearly in its definition of religion (this is the definition used for the 2011 National Housing Survey, which was the last time the census* asked about religion; next time will be in 2021):

Religion refers to the person's self-identification as having a connection or affiliation with any religious denomination, group, body, sect, cult or other religiously defined community or system of belief. Religion is not limited to formal membership in a religious organization or group. Persons without a religious connection or affiliation can self-identify as atheist, agnostic or humanist, or can provide another applicable response

It's pretty clear that it's not about what you believe, but rather about what religion/denomination you feel connected to, or affiliated with.

* The 2011 National Housing Survey is technically not the same thing as the 2011 census. In 2010, the Harper government scrapped the mandatory long-form census and replaced it with an optional survey. They justified it as answering calls from a tiny minority of people who objected to the government collecting personal data. The move sparked outcry from just about everyone who cared about social research and evidence-based governance, and, as predicted, was a disaster. The mandatory long-form census was restored by the Trudeau government in time for the 2016 census, but unfortunately we won't actually get religion data until 2021. Until then, the dodgy 2011 National Housing Survey data is all we have, other than data from the 2001 census.

So a "None" is not someone with no religion. A "None" is someone who doesn't affiliate with a religion or religious group.

That may sound like nitpicking, but it turns out that there is a huge difference, and it really matters.

For starters, it's very common for extremely religious people to deny affiliation with all religions and religious groups. There are multiple reasons why that happens:

People who are extremely religious can also be extremely picky about their beliefs. Minor theological differences that most people don't care about become major sticking points (I'm reminded of that classic Emo Philips joke). For example, a person might believe literally every single part of the Catholic dogma except that they reject dyophysitism (Jesus has two natures: divine and human) in favour of miaphysitism (Jesus has one nature that is both divine and human), and feel so strongly about it that it's enough for them to reject any affiliation with Catholicism.

Extremely religious people often craft their own, idiosyncratic religious beliefs, usually by mixing together bits of existing religious traditions (a practice called syncretism). Sometimes that becomes the foundation for a whole new religion, but most of the time it's just one person's private faith.

It's also not uncommon for extremely religious people to be in denial that their beliefs are religious. You sometimes hear people insisting that Christianity or Islam is "not a religion; it's a philosophy", or "way-of-life".

Aside from the extremely religious, there's also a rapidly growing trend of treating "religion" as a dirty word because of its perceived connection to things like denial of science and reality, and intolerance. To avoid that stigma, people will call themselves "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR).[†] It's not uncommon to find people whose belief systems are exactly in line with most mainline Christian denominations, yet insist that they're SBNR.

† I'm not entirely clear on how StatCan tallies people who explicitly declare themselves SBNR. I suspect they file them under "no religious affiliation, other". It's probably not all that common though; most SBNR people probably just check the "no affiliation" box and leave it at that.

The reason why this matters is because these people who are religious but unaffiliated make up the majority of the "Nones". Here is a graphic showing data from recent Pew surveys of US adults:

The situation may be even more extreme in Canada. A 2014 Angus Reid survey found that a plurality of Canadians are SBNR, and even if you single out the people who reject religion, 41% of those are BNR.

All this means that if you make the mistake of assuming that "None" means "nonreligious" — or, even worse, "atheist" — you're going to make some huge mistakes. My favourite example of this is an article from The Atlantic last year with the absurd headline: "Atheists Are Sometimes More Religious Than Christians". If you actually read the piece, it's clear that they're not talking about atheists at all, they're talking about "Nones":

Second, the researchers found that American "nones" — those who identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular — are more religious than European nones. The notion that religiously unaffiliated people can be religious at all may seem contradictory, but if you disaffiliate from organized religion it does not necessarily mean you've sworn off belief in God, say, or prayer.

The third finding reported in the study is by far the most striking. As it turns out, "American 'nones' are as religious as — or even more religious than — Christians in several European countries, including France, Germany, and the U.K."

"That was a surprise," Neha Sahgal, the lead researcher on the study, told me. "That's the comparison that's fascinating to me." She highlighted the fact that whereas only 23 percent of European Christians say they believe in God with absolute certainty, 27 percent of American nones say this.

I need to stress that while the origin of the "None" categorization is censuses and surveys that are just counting people and tallying them up by their religious affiliation, it actually infects science done about the nonreligious. There is a tragic dearth of real science studying the nonreligious to begin with — for details, I recommend checking out Professor Melanie Brewster's 2014 talk at Skepticon 7 — but a large chunk of the science that is done uses the aforementioned census and survey data in secondary data analyses. In plain English, researchers are not actually doing proper data collection, they're simply using the data that's already out there... which often doesn't do a good job of separating the actual nonbelievers from the merely unaffiliated who are still very religious, when it even bothers to try.

So that's the situation with the term "None":

It doesn't mean what most people think it means. It has nothing to do with being nonreligious. It's only about affiliation; it's only about identifying with a religion, not believing in that religion's tenets.

The category is actually dominated by the "wrong" people. By "wrong" I mean: not the people "Nones" are generally assumed to be. Most people assume "Nones" are nonreligious. In fact, most "Nones" are very religious, and in some ways even more religious than the average person that affiliates with a mainstream religion.

The categorization has already negatively impacted science. In the talk linked above, Professor Brewster explains how lumping atheists in with the “unaffiliated” distorted psychological research for almost two decades, and led to false notions about the mental health and social success of atheists.

The categorization has already negatively impacted atheists. Following from the point above, those false notions about the mental health of atheists led to actual discrimination. To this day, you don’t have to look too far to find people repeating myths that “science” has proven that atheists are psychologically unhealthy.

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

A Trans-Setting Star Exhibits Her Craft: The Transgender Community and the Starcraft II Professional Video Gamers

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 12, 2019

In the modern history of the sport, the world had great difficulty in the acceptance of what has now been termed mental sports, including chess and other non-contact, mostly non-physical competitive activities.

People devote their entire lives to these competitions out of sheer love of it. Some of the chess world came to a head with the long-time world champion Garry Kasparov competing against the supercomputer — super for the time at least — named Deep Blue.

Since this time, the interest in what may best be termed, for now, mental sports has simply grown a lot. This is particularly true for the number of those who have entered into the competitive gaming realm earning — and no word of exaggeration — hundreds of thousands of dollars (USD) in their professional careers, akin to professional skateboarders who you can appreciate in the artistry of their excellence in their chosen craft.

Akin to other sports worlds, some of the interesting aspects of the world of this new domain of sports gone mental-digital is the, yes, often well-known and substantiated instances of open misogyny within some sectors and amongst some members of the video gaming or gamer community.

But there may also be other facets to this dialogue not entirely covered. One is the win for the transgender community, likely, with the inclusion and non-controversy in the inclusion of a trans individual in the ranks of one of the more prominent and long-time famous real-time strategy or RTS games: Starcraft II.

Sasha Hostyn, born in December of 1993, is a professional Starcraft II player amongst the highest ranking in the world in addition to playing Dota 2 to some degree. The questions here relate to the ways in which a Canadian gamer is anything new.

It's not.

What is newer, especially given some of the regressive aspects of some of the community some (in-)famous incidents over the years in the world of professional video gaming, Hostyn, or "Scarlett," has been the only woman to win an international Starcraft II tournament.

More significantly, she is known as the queen of Starcraft II and, potentially, one of the most accomplished women video gamers in the land today, as well as being a trans woman.

What has been especially noteworthy in the world of professional video gaming here, Scarlett's gender identity is a non-issue within the community of announcers, gamers, and, as far as I can tell, the wider community of professional Starcraft II video gamers, which sets a tone and timbre on the world of professional video gaming different than before — not simply symbolically but in a display of recognized excellence in performance based on rankings and winnings.

That's trend-setting.

Ask Mark 2 — Squeezing More Some Things from Nothings

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 17, 2019

Mark Gibbs is an independently educated nonbeliever, who has some interesting and precise thoughts about the terminology in the survey data presented to the unbelieving community over the years. Here, in this series, we will explore some of the content, starting with the term “Nones” in an extended conversation continuing from Ask Mark 1 — Somethin’ About Nothin’: The Nones Ain’t Nothin’.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What words seem to more accurately describe the intended grouping than the Nones?

Mark Gibbs: That depends on what the intended grouping is!

You see, Professor Kosmin wasn’t wrong. ARIS is the American Religious Identification Survey; the whole point of it is which religion you identify with... not what you believe. Kosmin knew exactly what he was talking about: he was talking about people who don’t identify with any religions... he was not talking about nonbelievers; they’re not the same thing.

The problem isn’t the term itself. The widespread misuse and misunderstanding of the term is a symptom of a deeper problem: We’re generally terrible at differentiating between affiliation with a religion, and believing in that religion. That’s always a problem — for example, Islamophobic bigots make a point of not differentiating between believers in extremist Islamic ideologies and literally everybody who calls themselves “Muslim”. But it becomes particularly acute when you start talking about the lack of a religion: are you talking about the lack of affiliation, or the lack of belief? Or both?

If your goal is actually specifically to talk about people who are not affiliated with any religions, then “None” is exactly the right term.

But...

Most people who use the term “None” are not merely interested in affiliation or identification. And that is where the trouble starts. Most people use the term “None” as a synonym for “nonreligious”, or even “atheist”, and that’s how you end up with nonsense like that Atlantic headline, and dangerous misconceptions like those about atheist mental health.

It’s not the term’s fault. Even without the term, most people naïvely assume that the less engaged you are with religions, the more nonreligious you are. I mean, that just sounds tautologically true, right? Unfortunately, as is usually the case where religion and faith is involved, reality is much messier. Since it’s possible to have your own, idiosyncratic religious beliefs, it’s possible to be extremely religious without being affiliated with any religion. And, of course, people can, and do, simply assert that they have nothing to do with any religions despite holding the exact set of beliefs of one. (The inverse is also true: It’s possible — and very common — to be affiliated with a religion, but not actually hold any religious beliefs. We all know people like this; some of us were those people.)

And most of the time, affiliation is useless as a categorization anyway. There's lots of evidence out there that fundamentalist Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and so on have more in common with each other than they do with the moderate, casual, or progressive members of their own religions. If you tell me that some percentage of Christians hold some awful belief, that's pretty unhelpful information in practice, because it's far too broad a brush: "Christians" includes both the extreme social conservative, far-right, isolationist Mormon sects of rural Alberta, and the progressive, left-leaning United Church of Canada churches in suburban Toronto. It's a given that awful sects will hold awful beliefs! I'd be far more interested in learning how prevalent the awful belief is among casual religious believers — and it doesn't really matter whether they're Christian or something else; that would better tell me whether it's something to be concerned about or not. That would be more useful in assessing whether the problem is only extreme religion, or if even moderate religion is a concern.

So my position, technically, isn't really: "never use 'None'". It's: "only use 'None' where it actually applies". However, because of all the confusion around the term (and because we almost never mean it in its technically correct sense), it's probably better to just not use it at all. (Though, even that probably won't help, because people will probably incorrectly interpret any way of saying "unaffiliated" as meaning "lacking belief".)

But I don't want to just dodge the question, so let me see if I can actually give an answer....

This is a lot more complicated than you'd think, because you will probably end up not just changing the one term, but changing your whole typology. That's what Pew had to do last year, when they came up with a new typology to help understand religiosity. They ended up with seven categories, including two "non-religious" categories: one that's mostly atheists without any supernatural beliefs, and one that's mostly "spiritual but not religious" types that believes in psychics and crystal energy.

Pew's new grouping actually illustrates how useless the "None" grouping is (unless all you care about is specifically affiliation, and not beliefs). The "Solidly Secular" are pretty much synonymous with "nonbelievers"... yet 24% of them identify with a religion. The "Nones" include most of the "Solidly Secular" and "Religion Resisters"... but it also includes 30% of the "Spiritually Awake" and 17% of the "Relaxed Religious", and even 22% of the "Diversely Devout". So "Nones" doesn't just include a lot of people who aren't nonreligious, it also excludes at least a quarter of those who are!

I like the idea of the Pew grouping, though it is very US-centric. It focuses a little too heavily on Christianity, talking about "the Bible" repeatedly in its grouping questions — it asks if you believe specifically in "God as described in the Bible"... well, how are Jews and Muslims supposed to answer that? Heck, what's a Sikh to do? (I strongly suspect that if Pew asked about belief in God without adding "as described in the Bible", number of people who answer "yes" in the "Religion Resisters" category would skyrocket.)

I think I would do something very similar to what Pew did, though less US/Christianity-focused; so asking about belief God or a god generally, not specifically "God as described in the Bible". But I'm not a fan of the name "Solidly Secular". "Secular" already has too many other meanings, and this is just guaranteed to sow more confusion. For example: technically, devout Catholics who aren't clergy are secular. But don't get me started on all the problems with the word "secular".

I think a better term for that group would be “unbelievers”, because these are people who don’t believe in the tenets of religion — whether they still identify with a religion or not — and also don’t believe in other woo that isn’t normally called “religious”, like psychics and pyramid power. So I think I’d use a more generic variant of Pew’s typology, but with “Solidly Secular” renamed to “[something] Unbelievers”; I’ll leave it up to Pew to come up with a cute alliteration.

Ask Sally 2— Feedback on AIPAC: ‘Vitriol’ and Israel

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 18, 2019

***Sally Buxbaum Hunt** is a Sexual Education, Sex-Positive, Separation of Church and State Activist and Organizer, and a Progressive. Here we talk about AIPAC and Israel.*

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You have some thoughts on AIPAC and the news based on the news, recently. Why have these been of interest in the past couple of weeks?

Sally Buxbaum Hunt: It has been difficult seeing the mainstream media narrative that Ilhan Omar has been antisemitic based on her remarks. It has been the main messaging from most of our politicians. That is unacceptable because it's not true.

Ilhan Omar did not say anything antisemitic. I say this as someone of Jewish heritage myself. But you don't have to be of Jewish background to understand these very basic facts, because all she did was point out the simple fact that these lobbying groups, e.g., AIPAC, want politicians to give extra tax dollars to US politicians so those politicians support Israel.

That is the whole point of AIPAC. They are a pro-Israel lobbying group. AIPAC raises money, gives this money to politicians, and then those politicians should give unwavering support to Israel and special privileges to Israel.

That this lobbying group, AIPAC, is giving extra tax dollars — US tax dollars — to Israel's government. This is true. This is absolutely true [Laughing]. Ilhan Omar was pointing this out. Then many people freaked out and said this was antisemitic.

She even was forced to apologize by Democratic leadership. When I saw her apology, I appreciated that she still made the point about the problem with lobbying groups in the apology, where she did not want to alienate them. It was not her goal.

She was pressured to make the apology. She definitely shouldn't have been pressured to apologize at all. Because she said absolutely nothing wrong. Part of this fake controversy is just because she's a Muslim. A big problem is the extreme bigotry against Muslims, and also that she is black.

That makes her a bigger target. I think racism is another reason here. She is a target for being a Muslim woman and a black woman, especially [Laughing] being both of those at the same time. But this idea that no one can criticize AIPAC or can ever criticize Israel is irrational and illogical.

It makes no sense. Israel is not the same as Jews. Jewish people are not a monolith. There are all sorts of views and ideas, political ideologies. Not every Jewish person supports the government of Israel. Not every Jewish person supports the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. That is what this issue is about.

No one should support the occupation. That is the bottom line. Palestinians who live in the occupied territories are trying to live their lives. Their home communities are constantly under military occupation. They are constantly being terrorized, brutalized, harassed, and oppressed. They don't even have voting rights regarding the government that rules over them every day.

They cannot live freely. They are in dire poverty and in utter hopelessness. Anyone who mentions Palestinians being angry at Israel; they are justifiably angry at this government. That is the main point that I think everyone needs to understand here.

The government of Israel is an occupying force of a government. They are a warmongering and oppressive government to Palestinian civilians living in these occupied territories. That is the point right there. Ilhan Omar is right to point out AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobbying group, has one mission. That is to raise money for politicians, so they give unwavering support from US taxpayer funds that are supporting this occupation.

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

Oklahoma Antiscience Legislation Combatted

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 19, 2019

NCSE reported on the defeat of a set of antiscience legislation in Oklahoma's Senate Bill 14. The purpose was for the empowerment of science denialists.

The vote failed 6–9 in terms of winning the recommendation of the House Committee on Education. This was on February 12, 2019. The bill was framed as “the Oklahoma Science Education Act.”

In pragmatic terms, this meant that teachers in Oklahoma would be able to “understand, analyze, critique[,] and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories covered in the course being taught.”

But, at the same time, this meant the prohibition of local and state administrators from “exercising supervisory responsibility,” as phrased by the NCSE.

That is to say, if a science teacher denied the fundamentals of science, they could be empowered to teach non-science views. None of the theories identified as particularly controversial.

However, the efforts came forth from a sole sponsor named David Bullard. He is new to the legislature. The predecessor of Bullard (R-District 6) was Josh Brecheen. There was a similar form of a bill proposed there.

But also, since the start of 2019, two other bills have been proposed including North Dakota's House Bill 1538 and South Dakota's House Bill 1270.

Differentials in Common Problems

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 19, 2019

The Metro reported on Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun from Saudi Arabia, who has been granted asylum to Canada, recently. She fled to Kuwait from alleged abuse and then landed in Bangkok. Following this, she began to seek asylum.

With the surprising effectiveness of the work by al-Qunun and others, and similar social media social justice campaigns including #MeToo, Twitter became a catalytic platform for the improved efficacy of the calls for social justice for Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun.

As some may note, the socio-political left and the socio-political right tend to disagree on what should be the emphasis of the social justice in most instances, and utilize epithets against the opposition in the cases of that which they disagree.

But the possibility of further abuse of a girl and the killing of an ex-Muslim united the internet for social good, a social justice activist effort. Many Canadian voices were in favor of the work there.

The unifying story was the abuse and the context in which men and women live in the culture. Men and women are grossly unequal in Saudi society.

One interesting story is relayed within the article about the way this works for gay men too. The former Muslim man, who left, had to disengage with family, because of the disagreements in belief.

The author described a sympathy, in common experiences, with leaving religion in an area of the world at this time that takes the violent approach to those who leave. One can see this environment with Christian in the centuries past.

Those who leave in these coerced-into-religion contexts become difficult, dangerous, and even life-threatening. The man felt as though — as a gay Muslim man — he had let down the creator and sustainer of the universe.

As opined, “I know of Christians who have left their faith and converted to Islam who talk of pressures from their families, and where some have had their immediate family stop all communication, sometimes for decades. However, what is troubling is that the levels of pressure and intimidation against ex-Muslims rumbles on and that time and time again,”

To attribute this to innate tendencies is wrong, as if one group is a separate species, while, at the same time, to deny this happening disproportionately in Muslim communities is also wrong, it is happening at a higher rate, insofar as a large number of ex-Muslim communities are showing u — and the subsequent stories coming out connected to them.

The author of the opinion piece explained, “I heard from those I interviewed they feared to leave Islam and when they did, they felt scared all of this, it is important to mention that it is not faith or religions themselves that are the problem. Yes, there are difficult elements of texts, but it is how they are interpreted and how families and individuals implement them in their families. For many of the people I interviewed, a harsh and controlling interpretation of Islam meant that they

pushed their loved one away from Islam. Yet, there are just as many families where Islam is interpreted so that people feel accepted, loved and valued.”

Breaking: UNDRIP, Alive

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 19, 2019

The government of British Columbia will be introducing legislation in order to implement an international document relating to the Indigenous rights of the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

The document is a declaration entitled the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). This was announced in a recent throne speech.

This would make British Columbia the first province in the country to legislate the endorsement of Canada of the UNDRIP. British Columbia Premier John Horgan stated that he remains unsure as to what this may look like but the legislative councils are working on solutions.

“I know it will be more than symbolic,” Horgan said, “We need to address reconciliation in British Columbia, not just for social justice... but for economic equality for all citizens, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.”

During the campaign trail for Horgan, there was a promise to respect, recognize, and implement the 46 articles of the UNDRIP. Those recognized as human rights for Indigenous peoples around the world. One of which is the right to self-determination. Other peoples have it. Therefore, Indigenous peoples should have it. That’s elementary.

The UN Member States with Indigenous peoples and questions surrounding land and territory should acquire free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) in order to ensure the rights of Indigenous peoples are respected in these areas.

Horgan’s NDP campaigned on a promise to implement UNDRIP, which includes 46 articles meant to recognize the basic human rights of Indigenous Peoples’ along with their rights to self-determination.

Horgan stated, “For too long uncertainty on the land base has led to investment decisions being foregone, and I believe that that hurts Indigenous people and it hurts other British Columbians.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, We Bring You, Once More, the Trojan Horse, “Controversial Issues”

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 20, 2019

A resolution in South Dakota was brought to the legislature that was urging for the adoption of an ethics code that would be for the public school teachers.

The NCSE reported on the resolution and considered this as potentially adversely affecting the state of science education.

As reported, “House Concurrent Resolution 1002 (PDF), filed on January 25, 2019, by fifteen legislators (all Republicans) and referred to the House Education Committee, is aimed primarily at preventing what it describes as ‘political or ideological indoctrination.’”

While, at the same time, there would be a provision within the proposal, the code, for the prohibition for educators from teaching “any issue that is part of a political party platform at the national, state, or local level.”

Glenn Branch, of the NCSE, stated that it is common for state political parties to take individual stands on evolution and purported other options in the development and speciation of life.

Indeed, this can happen with climate change as well. With the imposition of the possible bill, then the teachers would be prevented from teaching evolution and, in fact, pressure into teaching anti-evolution stances and climate change denialist positions.

The reportage concluded, “A similar resolution, House Joint Resolution 684, is under consideration in Virginia, and a similar bill, House Bill 2002, is under consideration in Arizona.”

Getting Warmer: Climate Change Literacy Bills in Washington

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 20, 2019

The issue of climate change is often misreported. It should be reported consistently and affirmatively as anthropogenic climate change or human-induced global warming in which the human industrial activity is a major factor in the problem in climate change.

One major aspect of the work is climate science literacy in order to combat the problem here. Washington has two identical bills now, which are aimed at climate science literacy.

These are for the Washington state legislature. One is called House Bill 1496. Another is entitled Senate Bill 5576. These are intended to establish a comprehensive program for more learning opportunities and education on climate science. It is meant to increase knowledge about climate science.

One facet for the media would be the introduction of the terminology as “anthropogenic climate change or “human-induced global warming” as a start.

There is an affirmation, in the pair of bills, for the increase in the skills and knowledge about climate science. It is only within Washington but this is a start, especially in a huge advanced industrial economy such as the United States.

The point is to introduce a greater skill and knowledge base amongst the young there. It will have information and opportunities for climate literacy and environmental education.

There is a reference to environmental and sustainability standards in one section of the Washington state code listing that is required as areas of education through the public schools.

This, according to the NCSE reportage, is simply an introduction of a new emphasis on sustainability.

As reported, it affirmed, “...critical knowledge and innovative strategies for effectively teaching climate science can be strengthened by qualified community-based organizations.”

One intriguing proposal is the foundation of a grant program through a nonprofit of the community for educational purposes via the Next Generation Science Standards. It's not indoctrination; it's minimal standards of a modernized educational on the environment.

The reportage concluded, “House Bill 1496 was introduced on January 23, 2019, and referred to the House Committee on Education; Senate Bill 5576 was introduced on January 24, 2019, and referred to the Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education.”

NGSS: Getting the Advanced Frontiers in Science Education to the Young

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 20, 2019

Amongst the noblest pursuits of the human species appears to be the education of the young, in which there is a proper and responsible passing onto the next generations the acquired knowledge of the prior ones.

One effort in the United States in the Next Generation Science Standard intended for school districts and accredited nonpublic schools. Iowa, for example, adopted the NGSS in 2015.

However, House File 61 is an interesting recent proposal that would prevent this from coming into full effect in Iowa, preventing NGSS from becoming the norm and expectation within the education system.

As reported, “The bill, introduced on January 23, 2019, and referred to the House Education Committee, is sponsored by Skyler Wheeler (R-District 4). In a 2016 interview with the Caffeinated Thoughts blog (April 19, 2016), Wheeler declared, “I also oppose NGSS as it pushes climate change ... NGSS also pushes evolution even more.”

The denial of standard and mainstream scientific findings is an important issue. Denial of evolution simply leaves medical and biological sciences professionals less likely to come out of Iowa.

But also, there is the issue of anthropogenic climate change denial. This is an issue threatening species survival and requires immediate action as this is an urgent issue.

“In 2017, Wheeler cosponsored House File 140, which contained the same provision about the NGSS, as well as House File 480,” the NCSE stated, “which would have required teachers in Iowa’s public schools to include ‘opposing points of view or beliefs’ to accompany any instruction relating to evolution, the origins of life, global warming, or human cloning. Both bills died in committee.”

There is nothing new here. Indeed, the educators see through the ploy and the Iowa Association of School Boards has already made an open declaration of opposition to the House File 61.

Compassion & Choices: Critical Moments in Life and Critical Moment in the Montana House Judiciary Committee

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 20, 2019

There was a 10–9 vote, recently, in the Montana House Judiciary Committee that moved HB 284 into the State House for further consideration. Compassion & Choices, an organization devoted to end of life choices, reported this as a critical moment and argued for the — and demanded the — shutting down of the “Physician Imprisonment Act” on the floor.

They asked, “Will you donate right now to help keep the pressure on legislators and protect medical aid in dying in Montana?”

This HB 284 is considered one in a long string of assaults on the medical aid in dying seen with Montana. It is one of the bills to undercut a landmark decision authorizing the practice with the state: *Baxter v. Montana*.

The direct meaning of HB 284 and others would lead to the prescribing of medical aid-in-dying medication by physicians to their patients would be prosecutable as homicide, murder, and would, in essence, permit the extension of needless suffering.

HB 284 is the latest in a series of long-standing attacks on medical aid in dying in Montana, Scott. This bill would undercut *Baxter v. Montana* (the landmark decision that authorized the practice in the state), make physicians who prescribe medical aid-in-dying medication to their patients vulnerable to prosecution for homicide and extend needless suffering.

“Not only that, but this bill marks the fifth time our opposition has tried to strip away Montanans’ access to medical aid in dying, and with your support, we’ve beat them back every time,” Compassion & Choices reported, “But, we haven’t defeated HB 284 yet. Our opposition is well-funded, relentless and committed to seeing medical aid in dying criminalized in Montana. That means we can’t afford to let up — not even for one second.”

Painfully Obvious: Wedgies and Wedges

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 20, 2019

In the march of continuous progress on the front of scientific knowledge, we come to the continual realization of the individuals with ideological stances preventing the proper instantiation of knowledge and education within the public sphere.

In fact, this can come in what has been termed, rather bluntly, a wedge strategy. If you pay even marginal attention, this will continue to arise again, and again, and again and again.

This time; it has arisen as a strategy in South Carolina. This is, in essence, a creation ‘science’ bill in South Carolina intended for export to the general public.

If enacted, House Bill 3826 would make permissible the elective courses on religion in public school districts in order to “require the teaching of various theories concerning the origin of life, including creation science[,] as part of the course content.” In short, this would permit the wedging of creationist theories into the curricula in addition to the standard curriculum of evolution via natural selection.

As reported, “The teaching of creation science in the public schools was ruled to be unconstitutional — a violation of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause — by a federal court in *McLean v. Arkansas* (1982) and by the Supreme Court in *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987).”

The bill, not so quietly, would require the displaying of “In God We Trust” in classrooms. The sponsors are Dwight A. Loftis (R-District 19) and James Mikell “Mike” Burns (R-District 17).

Going South on Science

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 21, 2019

There is, at the moment, antiscience legislation in South Dakota. It is House Bill 1270. The purpose of the bill would be to improperly represent the standard science curriculum within the science classroom.

The bill was introduced on January 30, 2019. The purpose is to make it so that teachers can be free to assist students in understanding, analyzing, critiquing, and reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the science information provided to them. This is the double-speak.

What, in actual fact, happens in the contexts of classrooms that would implement this, the aim would be to permit the disputing of evolution and anthropogenic climate change.

“Although no specific scientific topics are mentioned, the language of the bill matches the language in bills explicitly aimed at disputing evolution and/or climate change, including South Dakota’s SB 114 in 2015,” NCSE reported, “In 2016, the identical SB 83 was introduced and eventually died in committee; in 2017, the identical SB 55 passed the Senate but ultimately was defeated in the House Education Committee.”

SB 55 was a prior bill that was defeated. It was one that had received a consistent amount of opposition from the Associated School Board of South Dakota, the South Dakota Education Association, the School Administrators of South Dakota, and the South Dakota Department of Education.

The reportage concluded, “HB 1270 has eleven sponsors, nine in the House and two in the Senate, of whom seven are also sponsors of House Concurrent Resolution 1002 and House Bill 1113.”

Did Someone Say, “Controversial Issues”? Because I Heard, “Trojan Horse.”

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 21, 2019

The struggle continues onward with the reindeer hit mainly by the plane in Maine, but also with the latest “controversial issues” measure. This is a new tactic and a common one.

The proper move, politically and legally, is an identification of the move and then steadfast work against it. The tactics tend to stay the same. The titles and names tend to be different.

There is a bill within the Maine legislature that would, in fact, require the public school teachers to follow a code of conduct. That’s not bad, in fact. But the content is the questionable part of it.

There is a background context. The NCSE reported on the fifth measure of its type in 2019 alone. There are “South Dakota’s House Concurrent Resolution 1002 and House Bill 1113, Virginia’s House Joint Resolution 684, and Arizona’s House Bill 2002.”

The Maine Legislative Document 589 (House Paper 433), prefiled in the Maine House of Representatives, could require the state board of education to adopt an ethics code — again, ethics are good — but the code would prevent public school teachers from engaging in “political or ideological indoctrination.”

This would make the topics appearing on platforms of a state political party subject to open questioning and, thus, creating a basis for questioning scientific truths via questioning of party platforms. The big issue is the fact that a large number of the party platforms, at the state level, mention evolution via natural selection and anthropogenic climate change.

Sex With a Side of Humanism, in the City

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 21, 2019

Female roles in Hollywood and women in the movie and television industry continue to make further strides due, mostly, to their own efforts and activism for recognition, respect, and equal treatment with the men in the industries and on the screen.

Sarah Jessica Parker spoke on feminism and humanism. In the call for better roles for women, she remarked how this is not simply a feminist issue but, in actual fact, a humanist issue, broadly speaking.

Part of this may be due to the stigmatizing of the term “feminist.” Another part may be due to the universalist nature of the implications, in terms of direct representations, of the term “humanist.”

Of course, the terminology of feminism, in its traditionalist meaning, is universalist, as in women and men recognized as social and legal equals. Humanist simply moves this out into the level of the species.

“The actor reiterated this sentiment in a recent interview, explaining that she believes the LGBT+ community must be included when discussing better representation in film,” the Independent reported, “When questioned over whether or not female actors are being offered higher calibre roles than they have done in the past, the actor stated that she doesn’t feel as though she’s ‘equipped to speak to the quality across the board.’”

Parker’s hope is for the quality parts in movies and television will be part of the industry, not simply as a “call-to-arms” for feminists but, in fact, a general movement for the furtherance of humanism.

A humanist is someone who does not identify with the supernatural — not necessarily the rejection of the metaphysical but the supernatural — and emphasizes human reason, compassion, and science, in addition to their inherent limitations as evolved organisms.

Both respect the human rights of men and women. In that, there is a wide overlap in their outlooks.

“People of colour, gays, lesbians, and transgenders who are carving out this space. I’m not spitting in the face or being lazy about what still needs to be done — but I don’t think it’s just women anymore,” Parker said in 2015, in Cosmopolitan.

She further explained how the movement within the television and movie industry could be even more powerful if this was identified with the humanist movement. Others have proclaimed this as, in essence, an evasion tactic with the aforementioned demonization of the term feminist.

While, at the same time, these can both be true positions; the shift into humanist language may be more powerful than the limitations, currently, of the plurality of feminisms on offer.

But this could also lead to a similar problem with a wide range of humanisms on offer as well. As there is a wide range of humanisms, indeed, these can range from the deistic humanists to the atheistic humanists, and never the two meeting.

The world is complicated; people similarly so. Meryl Streep was also on record as identifying as humanist because of being for “nice easy balance,” which does reflect the casual style and flavor of thinking of the actress.

In addition, Susan Sarandon described her view of humanism too. It is not simply about the distinction but more about the overlap and then the appropriateness of the term to social context.

But certainly, these identifications as humanist by prominent women is an important aspect of the work to modernize the views of the humanist world and, as importantly, getting the title out into the mainstream sphere through prominent and respectable actresses.

Do Not Disappear Into That Dear Night, Dear, We Need You

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 21, 2019

The Independent reported on some of the outspoken feminism and empowerment of girls and women of Annie Lennox, former member of Eurythmics. She acknowledged the truism is the vast majority of older women simply becoming forgotten, but affirmed that this does not necessarily have to be the case. That older women do not simply have to become “invisible.”

This seems like the right orientation tome. She has continued to support important initiatives including Amnesty International and Greenpeace. Lennox is serious about feminisms and about the inculcation of the values and the term, likely, into the public sphere more and more.

Annie Lennox has spoken about the importance of empowering girls and women through feminism, expressing her belief that women her age should not have to feel as though they’ve become “invisible”.

The reportage stated, “‘My current focus is to bring the term ‘Global Feminism’ into the zeitgeist,’ Lennox tells Good Housekeeping. ‘I’m so happy we can use the ‘F’ word now and talk comfortably about being feminists!’”

For a long time, the term was something uncomfortable and not seen as worth mentioning. But, at the present moment, we are seeing a resurgence of consideration for the rights and responsibilities of women. Bearing in mind, the equality of women simply was not on the agenda for centuries and this continues to be fought against — in a red and tooth and claw manner.

As she — Lennox — has noted, it is criticizing men. It is critiquing negative behaviors that are damaging to men, women, and society that are being criticized. However, this is misrepresented as criticizing all masculinities, all men, and simply being a purported witch hunt. Not the case in most or all cases, insofar as I can tell, once one looks by the media extravaganza and hyperbole.

Now 64-years-old, Lennox is work to establish a renewed culture of interest in and public acceptance of older women, to fight against the stigma and the disappearing from public consciousness of women.

Lennox said, “At the end of the day, Global Feminism is about the fundamental human rights of girls and women — why should we continue to tolerate disrespect, abuse and disempowerment?”

“Dressing up for this photoshoot was really fun and trying on all these clothes for the pictures was enjoyable,” Lennox continued, “I want people to realise that women of my age don’t have to become invisible.”

UK May Be OK: Medical Assistance in Dying Law

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 21, 2019

Humanists UK has been pushing for what they have been terming a compassionate assisted dying law, in which there is a law set forth in support of a “compassionate, humane, assisted dying law.”

This movement comes with a wide variety of terms. One of the important aspects of all of this is the public support for it. The Royal College of Physicians is opposed to a humane right to die law.

However, if we look into the public support, it is overwhelming at 80%. 4 out of 5 citizens support the law for this most important of choices about the end of the journey — likely — for human life.

The recent survey can be important for the advancement of medical assistance in dying, in a prominent nation. Humanists UK formed the Assisted Dying Coalition.

With the cooperation and coordination with other organizations, this can be an important move for the empowerment of those who truly want to plan and make the choice for their final days.

UK citizens may be forced to travel to another country for an assisted death. If most of the nation wants it, and if this can be passed to democratically support what the nations wants, then this can be an important democratic advancement and, in fact, a compassionate one too.

Compassion & Choices Annual Fund 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 21, 2019

There is a need to support the compassionate ending of life. For some, there simply is nothing but pain until they die. Setup in an ethical society would permit the compassionate ending of life.

It would be something in which the individual living through this would make a cognizant choice or could pass the choice to another individual in order to live a healthier life.

The 2019 Annual Fund is important in the ability to pursue this, as Compassion & Choice is one such organization working to help with this level of autonomy at the end of life.

If you have some funds to donate to this enterprise, it would be greatly appreciated, as this would benefit the general welfare of multiple people who may not have the option otherwise — as we move into the future.

In the end, it is about values. Does one value the autonomy of the individual at the end of life, or not? If so, then this may not be a simple issue, but does become a compassionate and individual choice issue.

Moving into 2018, we can see the end of life freedom advancing, slowly. One important advancement was Our Care, Our Choice Act in Hawai'i. If finances are donated to the fund, then the goals for 2019 can be important for guiding the years forward.

Compassion & Choices wants to advance a 10-year goal of the procurement of medical aid in dying for, at least, half of the country. They also want to protect the current gains and increases that have been won so far.

They shift in the conversation is important too. We can find the ways in which Barbara Coombs Lee's work has been important for the provision of personal stories and advice around and on the issue of end-of-life care and medical assistance in dying.

All of this is important in a multipronged approach to the advancement of end-of-life care. Please donate if you can.

Canadian Free Speech Warriors: Rights 101, Get Your Terms Right

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 21, 2019

To start some movement, whether of a religious or secular, political or social, nature, there should be a clarification of terms and appropriate utilization of the terminology.

If we look into the general work of the free speech advocates who label others with the epithet social justice warriors, the appropriate terminology for them, thus, becomes free speech warriors.

For the free speech warriors, in Canadian society, there seems to be a consistent confusion of terminology and rights. There is a discussion around the right to free speech in Canadian environments, as if this is the proper terminology, right, and replicates or maps identically onto the Canadian landscape.

With even a single Google search or a trip to the local library, the most base research can represent the incorrect stipulations amongst the free speech warriors.

As the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada states, “The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.”

This doesn’t require research. It simply needs reading. That’s it. This appears to not have been done, at all, amongst an entire modern ideological movement.

When we look further into the Charter, we can see the respect for the rights and freedoms in Canadian society for the acknowledgment, respect, and maintenance of the free and democratic society of modern Canada.

This leads to some further analysis, though. If the phrase is “free speech” or “freedom of speech” amongst the free speech warriors, the, obvious, contextualization is where does this terminology come from, as noted the terms come from the United States of America and then get exported to the cold place in the North.

Reading the First Amendment to the U.S Constitution, it, in full, states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

The abridgement of “freedom of speech” is prohibited here. In other words, the right is not to freedom of expression but, in actual fact, the freedom of speech or “free speech.” Thus, the only true free speech warriors are from America in this interpretation.

But also, we can read further in the Canadian Charter. It, clearly, states in Article 2:

2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

(a) freedom of conscience and religion;

(b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;

(c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and

(d) freedom of association.

Here we come to the crux and comparison of the issue, it is not complicated, easily read, and simply overlooked. David Millard Haskell gets the terminology correct. That's praiseworthy.

However, others simply fail to notice this. The free speech warriors miss the stipulation — because they didn't read the Charter and may have simply wanted to be a part of an ideological movement — about freedom of expression.

This is unassailable in the terminology. In America, the right is specific to freedom of speech. In Canada, the right is to freedom of expression. The question to the free speech warriors is if they want to have a coherent movement and activism in order to protect the correct rights within the appropriate bounded geography within which the rights and responsibilities are bound as well.

If not, it will continue, as it has for years, to remain incoherent, overgeneralization, and wrongly using rights in different contexts in which they do not apply.

Ask Terrah 2 — The Core of Customer Service

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 24, 2019

Terrah Short earned a Bachelor's in Philosophy (Analytic) with a Minor in Disaster Risk Reduction from Western Washington University in March 2017. She is a product of a working single father and the Puget Sound area of Western Washington in the United States of America. Here we talk about customer service.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are the main considerations in keeping a customer happy?

Terrah Short: You must take into account the individual, with each customer. When I really think about it, it does seem quite exhausting! Like in all facets of life, it's important to remember that they are each an individual person, just like every retail worker. To get more in-depth, how I manage each customer is going to depend on what shift I'm working, what time of day it is, how busy it is, and sometimes it comes down to my own mood or what's going on in my life, though I do my best not to let that affect my quality of service.

I do my best to take each customer where they're at, check in with them as I'm checking their groceries, ask if they need their meat separate, their soaps in a separate bag from their foods, or if they need their bags to be light, and these are the sorts of things customers remember. Knowing you took the time to ask them the small things that can be a lot. I recall a customer who appeared able-bodied, but when I asked if they needed their bags light (they had brought a large amount of them), they lit up and were grateful I asked as they had recently had surgery and couldn't lift more than 10lbs.

At the end of the day, I think we all appreciate someone taking an interest in the big or small needs that we as a customer may forget to ask or just appreciate even if we weren't in need of the accommodation.

Jacobsen: When a customer is wrong but belligerent, how do you handle them?

Short: To start, I try to just listen and try to understand it from their perspective. Most often we can solve the issue by getting the transaction done and offering everything we can to make the situation smooth. However, if they get belligerent, we should always escalate it to the person-in-charge (PIC). I will usually offer to have them step aside and to talk to my PIC, and generally they don't want to wait around. The biggest challenges have come up when I personally was working our swing/night shift (generally 8pm-3:30am), and I have other co-workers who work this shift and have had similar experiences. At night, since there can be anywhere from myself (the cashier) and four others (our grocery night stockers) to just myself and the night PIC. Generally, I would try to triage the situation myself, tolerate what could be described as abusive behavior from customers, because if I wasn't in danger or if it wasn't becoming too much of an issue, there was no reason to bring the PIC into it. We have a wide range of customers that come into our store, from college students, seniors, professors, people passing through, tourists, and unfortunately, we also have a large population of people who come in strung out, drunk, or some other combination of intoxication.

Jacobsen: When a lower-level employee is going through a problem, does this become a basis for the reportage up the chain if this becomes unmanageable for them?

Short: It depends on the problem. Most often, things go unmentioned and lower-level employees talk among themselves, we try and problem solve and support one another together. I feel like many of us just try to get through our shifts, not stir the pot, and maintain employment status. Though I'd like to think if things really got bad or uncomfortable, that our entry-level employees, including myself, would be willing to go to our supervisors, or at least our Union, to talk about what we're going through.

Jacobsen: How does the code of conduct referenced in Ask Terrah 1 — Retail and Customer Service relate to this?

Short: I think it relates to all of it. Do your best to provide a positive experience for the customer, but make sure you adhere to, or even defer to, company policy. That is one way we are encouraged to protect ourselves or to explain decisions made, especially when selling alcohol or tobacco, that it is company policy and there is nothing we can really do. I think it is important that we as retail service folks start to stand up with the power that is being afforded us through our Unions and support from our supervisors. Taking care of ourselves needs to be the priority, but far too often, we just need to pay the bills and sometimes that means putting up with unpleasantness.

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

Ask Mark 3— Peeves, to Nones, and Back Again: A Tale of Marko Gibbons

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 6, 2019

Mark Gibbs is an independently educated nonbeliever, who has some interesting and precise thoughts about the terminology in the survey data presented to the unbelieving community over the years. Here, in this series, we will explore some of the content, starting with the term “Nones.”

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: If you could redo surveys and analyses of the surveys by Pew Research and others on the non-religious, how would you do it?

Mark Gibbs: Well, doing surveys well is a highly technical art, so I don’t want to come off as an opinionated dummy telling experienced professionals what to do. There’s a very good reason why they keep using affiliation as a metric: it’s so easy and cheap. It’s a single question, it’s easy for survey respondents to understand, and it’s trivial to group data by. It also allows your data to be easily compared with just about every other survey out there.

And, honestly, there are times when affiliation is a useful metric. For example, a survey that finds that a high proportion of people who identify as Catholic hold a disgusting opinion is not useless. It is very effective as a fact to hold in the face of people who continue to identify as Catholic: “How can you still call yourself Catholic when this is what you’re identifying with?”

However... it is true that using affiliation as a metric just doesn’t work for finding out about nonbelievers. And nonbelievers are my people; I want to know more about them. So with respect to the experts, I’ll just brainstorm some possibilities. And I want to stress this is really only aimed at people doing opinion surveys, not actual social scientists. This may already be a solved problem in social science; I don’t keep up with the field closely enough to know.

The first thing I’d like to see is a de-emphasis on affiliation, and more focus on beliefs or intensity of belief. I’d like to see surveys that don’t just ask: “what (religious) team are you on?”

As for how to do that — and let me stress that I’m just totally spit-balling here — the affiliation question might be replaced with a question like:

Which of the following best reflect your beliefs (choose all that apply):

- I believe that God exists.
- I believe that there is life after death.
- I believe in reincarnation.
- I believe that psychic powers (precognition, telekinesis, remote viewing, etc.) exist.
- (and so on...)

A modest proposal for a better survey question about religiosity

The exact options would have to be carefully chosen, and ideally standardized. Respondents could then be grouped according to their choices — basically the same thing Pew does with their new typology.

Is that actually practical? You'd have to ask experts in the field. Certainly it would be more complicated (and thus, more expensive) than a simple affiliation/identification test. But I think that's justifiable given that religion is such a complicated topic. And we really need more research done about actual beliefs — not mere affiliation — not least because you can't really learn anything about nonbelievers if all you ask is mere affiliation.

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

Gibbs: Thank you for taking an interest in this pet peeve of mine!

Sincere Belief: On Behalf of the Unborn in Alabama

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 7, 2019

Time Magazine reported on a man from Alabama who is, in fact, filing a lawsuit against a reproductive health center for an unborn fetus.

This is stated as, potentially, one of the first cases of this. A lawsuit based on the purported rights of an aborted fetus.

Obviously, the Alabaman has sincere beliefs as to the rights and privileges — legal and otherwise — of the fetus. The question is truly if this fits into a standard human rights framework or only in the minds of a minority of the American public aligning themselves within the perspective of the man from Alabama.

“Ryan Magers, who says his ex-girlfriend had an abortion against his wishes, filed a lawsuit against the Women’s Center for Reproductive Alternatives in Madison County, local CBS affiliate WHNT News 19 reported Tuesday,” Time Magazine stated.

In the papers filed to the court for the lawsuit, Magers stated that the ex-girlfriend took a pill to terminate or end the pregnancy on February 12, 2017, in spite of the pleas of keeping the baby, by Magers.

Of course, this implies, if taking the testimony of Magers, a strong difference of opinion on the eventual birthing as a child after the fetus sufficiently developed or the actual termination of the fetus — not a baby.

Time Magazine said, “This week, an Alabama probate judge granted Magers’ petition to represent the estate of the fetus, which the suit calls “Baby Roe.” But according to WHNT, the court papers do not make it clear that “Baby Roe” was an aborted fetus.”

A jury trial is being sought, purportedly, by Magers, where Brent Helms will be the attorney for Magers. Helms is claiming the case breaks legal ground, as a Baby Roe case — so to speak. This appears as if an explicit attempt to build off the success of the Roe v Wade decision of 1973 in the United States.

This is, for a Canadian audience, akin to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1968–1969 superseded and expanded, in a sense, by the R v Morgentaler Supreme Court of Canada decision from 1988.

The name “Roe” is a reflection of “John Doe” for the everyman but for the everywoman, “Jane Roe.” It is intended as a general law. The current context is, in this sense, for the “Baby Roe” to mirror this. Ironically, the traditionalist strain wants to have the women and children take the man’s name.

But, in this case, the every-child, or, rather, the every-fetus, takes on the name of the mother, the everywoman Jane Roe.

Helms said, “This is the first estate that I’m aware of that has ever been opened for an aborted baby.”

Alabama stated that the unborn fetuses have identical rights as an individual born in an amendment from last November. It has been marked a victory by some.

It is part of the growing movement called the “Personhood Movement.” Their sole goal is the constitutional rights of personhood being granted to a fertilized egg — a single cell. In this, we can see the influence of traditional religious ideological stances about the moment of conception.

“The same legislation also says that the Alabama constitution does not protect a woman’s right to an abortion — language added in the event of Roe v. Wade getting overturned,” Time Magazine described, “The Supreme Court’s landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision granted women in the U.S. the legal right to abortions. The addition of conservative justice Brett Kavanaugh on the bench has raised concerns among pro-choice activists that women’s right to abortion in the U.S. may come under threat.”

Pro-choice activists are beginning to talk more about this and view this as a scary development for some of them.

In Conversation with Maya Bahl on Edges of Research in Biology, Ethnicity, and Genetics

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 7, 2019

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

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are the central research questions on the edge of the field in studies of biology and ethnicity, and genetic studies?

Maya Bahl: The age-old question in biology, whether it's with animals or humans, has been genetic variation, and how it came to be with evolution and an adaption to the environment. Generally, those in warmer climates have darker skin tones in accommodating the sun and heat exposure while those in colder climates are lighter skinned and wouldn't have a lasting exposure to sun and heat. A population adapting to their environment would also mean that members would be more at risk for a certain type of illness when taken out of their home environment. With humans migrating 100,000 years ago and since, there has been genetic mixing and adapting, where as a result we can see patterns of ailments in certain populations.

Another main question for ethnicity studies is generalizing populations, or a sense of fitting a group of people into one category. In the U.S this would relate to health disparity in the U.S. On top of a population showing a tendency in getting diabetes for instance, there might be other issues that concerns economic or language availability in receiving the best care for the ailment.

Jacobsen: Following from the previous question, how is this impacting the ways in which the field is advancing as well as providing new insights into old questions of the origins of humanity and the great similarities of all human beings?

Bahl: Climate change and global warming are significantly contributing to our understanding of genetics and human migration, just simply by the warming and cooling of the earth we have seen that over the years humans have been successfully adapting to these changes — either by varying skeletal structures or by tool making.

Genetics specifically is also advancing with the ever increased presence of DNA testing, from recounting family trees to solving crimes. The hurdle for this though is obtaining consent from families and places to further investigate!

Jacobsen: With this new knowledge of ethnicity and the evolution of humanity, what do you think this is doing to the conditions of the viability of race-based discussions from “race scientists,” “race realists,” or, more recently, “human biodiversity” advocates?

Bahl: A general takeaway for me is that the planet is seeking to get more politically correct, so older usages for populations such as “negro” and “negroid” definitely don't work and are instead racial slurs. Also at the same time, categorizing people in the U.S based on location is used for convenience — such with “Hispanic” and “Latino”. The actuality of the term “Hispanic”

combines those who are from the seven Central American countries, while “Latino” seeks to combine the twelve South American countries into one entity. To make sweeping generalizations with populations is good in some cases — like to get a glimpse into the study of Anthropology and in genetic variation studies, but falsely stereotyping for someone else’s gain is not an effective use to generalize a population.

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

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The Longest Sentence of One's Life: "I do."

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 12, 2019

Most young people, men and women, want to marry one another. The questions arise, in younger generations growing in the wave of divorces in the West or seeing divorces in the West, about the nature of divorce, the proceedings and relations afterward, and the supports in place.

The Independent took account of the increasing interest in the worldview or life stance humanist in this most important of life domains for the vast majority of the population who, in fact, want to marry and have children.

It has been researched in some prior academic work by humanists, including Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, that in spite of the increase in, for example, Canadian society of the secular by belief or the non-religious, and so on, the consistent trend has been a stabilization of the cultural tradition of marriage.

Something about this institution holds a special place in the ways in the English, the Welsh, the Scottish, the Canadian, and others. The due diligence on the part of the humanist leadership and community would be to take this into account as an empirical fact and then plan, and act, in accordance with the reality presented to us: human beings like weddings.

In addition, and with the hyper-cautious current generations in regards to weddings and partnerships, in the West, at least, we can see the important empirics provided by The Independent. The humanist weddings, compared to other forms of ceremonies, appear to divorce less — based on new data.

The data comes from a biased source in Humanists UK, but the information could be valid regardless of the potential bias or conflict of interest in the source used for the citation.

Interestingly enough, the statistics cited by Humanists UK, to dig a tad deeper into the rabbit hole, comes from the official statistics.

If you take some time to sift through the data on record for Civil, Humanist, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, and Other Religion categories for the weddings and the divorces, literally, every other type of marriage indicated an increase in the divorce rate whilst the humanists recorded a decrease in the divorce rate as the marriages lasted longer.

In fact, only Civil marriages seemed to do some of the same, but there was a stabilization of the divorce rate as the marriages counted were from 5–10 years and then 10–15 years. This doesn't mean, by necessity, the superiority of the humanist marriages, but, certainly, this indicates an improved status of the divorce rate. Which, I guess, in one analysis, can imply better in the long term survival of the marriages.

One weakness of the data here is the fact of the limitations in the range of the data. It is on a limited number of types of beliefs. It, also, is limited to Scotland as a data set. Something of interest would be an international research study on humanist and other belief wedding ceremonies around the world controlling for reasonable confounding variables including family size, prior marital status — e.g., first or second, or third, marriage, and so on, socioeconomic status, educational status, region of the world, and so on.

The assumption would be a similar trend, or, perhaps, a null result in which the belief systems behind the ritual of a union, behind the marriage ceremony, in essence, amounts to a completely negative result overall. However, an in-camp bias would want, of course, the humanist ceremonies to be a protection against the ravages, typically, of the breakdown of a union in the case of divorce.

As stated by Humanists UK, “Overall, looking at marriages within the last fifteen years, 0.25% of couples who had a humanist marriage got divorced in 2017–18, compared to 0.84% of all other couples. This stark difference remains regardless of duration of marriage.”

An important note, no doubt, but does this amount to a statistically significant result or simply too tiny to become noteworthy; it may be salient to those who want a reduced odds of 0.59%. However, we simply do not know, as far as I can tell — as the data is only one country. It seems promising, though.

In the reportage by The Independent, humanist weddings are not formally recognized by England or Wales. However, Scotland, happily, has seen their legalization since as far back to the 2005 — you know, the Dark Ages of modernity.

The Civil Marriage Act of July 20, 2005, was, by comparison, the time when Canada legalized same-sex marriage, which is the country of origin and residence for me.

Now, humanist weddings, as of 2018, are recognized in North Ireland. This is all to the good, not simply the humanist good but those with goodwill and understanding of human right stipulations about equality. Of course, there may be personal legacy reasons or political motivations upon which the movements for equality in societies. However, the presence of greater equality is, at root, praiseworthy.

“...couples in England and Wales may choose to legalise their nuptials at a local registry office either before or after their humanist ceremony. The figures,” The Independent stated, “which were obtained by the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service and released to the BBC via a freedom of information request, reveal there were 5,072 humanist marriages in Scotland between 2017 and 2018. Meanwhile, there were 3,166 Church of Scotland ceremonies and 1,182 Roman Catholic ceremonies; the most popular type of wedding was a civil ceremony, with 14,702 taking place in that same time.”

In essence, a humanist wedding as a non-religious ceremony, as an alternative to some of the more traditional or, rather, the traditional religious services and ceremonies provided by other belief systems.

A humanist celebrant will be the one to officiate the wedding or conduct the funeral within the framework of official training and then working within the constraints of the ideology of the movement. Humanist simply rejects the supernatural while harboring something more akin to a life stance or an ethical philosophy. In this sense, it is pragmatic.

Humanists UK stated, “[A humanist will] make ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals... [where] human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.”

Meaning not as a constituent element of the universe but as a derivative of human beings in relation to it. Human beings make meaning. Some of those meanings exist in the long-term

partnerships most choose to embark upon, in which further meaning can be gained through a ceremony to mark and honor it.

Andrew Copson, the Chief Executive of Humanists UK, stated, “These figures show what a good start for couples a humanist wedding can be... Humanist weddings are deeply personal, with a unique ceremony crafted for each couple by a celebrant that gets to know them well.”

One of the good sets of data comes from YouGov research into public attitudes about acceptance of humanist weddings. In England and Wales, 7 out of 10 adults would like to see the humanist weddings legally recognized.

Ask Dr. Faizal 1 — Trinity and Tawheed, and How It is Possible to Have a Theological Reconciliation Between Christianity and Islam

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 12, 2019

Professor Mir Faizal is an Adjunct Professor in Physics and Astronomy at the University of Lethbridge. Here we talk about theology in an educational and exploratory series.

Christianity and Islam together form about half of the world's population. There have been centuries on the conflict between them. This conflict has both political and religious dimensions. It is important to resolve the religious conflict, to help resolve the political conflict.

The difficulty here is that many concepts in Christianity on one hand, and Islam and Judaism on the other, seem so different, that it becomes hard to imagine a way to reconcile them. This event starts from the concept of Trinity in Christianity, and Tawheed in Islam. In this discussion, with Dr. Mir Faizal, he will argue that these concepts can be reconciled, if they are properly understood.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: The central point of religious conflict between Christianity on one side, and Judaism and Islam on the other is the doctrine of Trinity.

The problem here is that even many Christians do not understand Trinity, so before we can resolve this, can you tell us why do you think Trinity is difficult to understand, and is there a way in which it can be understood?

Dr. Mir Faizal: I think the doctrine of Trinity is not understood properly, as a lot of different concepts are put together and called the Trinity. If those concepts are understood separately, and the relation between them is also understood, this concept can be understood better.

I would call them as Biblical Trinity, Spiritual Trinity, Theological Trinity, and Linguistic Trinity. To start to analyze trinity, we need to differentiate between these concepts and the relation between each them.

Jacobsen: What is the Biblical Trinity? Are there Biblical expressions for the Trinity?

Faizal: The Bible states in John 1:1, "In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Now, this is a spiritual sentence, which can be understood experientially.

It says something very interesting. It first differentiates between the Word of God and God, and then equates them. This is rather a deep expression, which can lead to a deeper understanding of how God can be approached.

To understand this first let us shift the context. Let us analyze another example. Let us say, we want to express something, like the constitution of America is what America is based on, and it summarizes the thoughts of the founding fathers of America.

Furthermore, this spirit of the constitution was actualized in the form of Abraham Lincoln. A nice way to put it would be as “In the beginning was the constitution, and the constitution was with the founding fathers, and the constitution was the founding fathers. And the constitution was made flesh, and dwelt among us (as Abraham Lincoln).”

This sentence summarizes this idea in a deeper way than just saying Abraham Lincoln followed the constitution. It may be noted that now Abraham Lincoln can be called, as the founding fathers, son of the founding father, servant of the founding father, the word of founding fathers made flesh. All those expressions are correct.

Now, Jesus is called the Word of God in John 1:14, as son of God in John 3:16 as the servant of God in Acts 3:13 and as God indirectly (as he is the Word of God, and the Word of God is called God) in John 1:1. If understood properly, there is no contradiction between Acts 3:13 “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus” and John 1:1.

All these statements are correct in their own right, if understood properly. A debate on how Lincoln can be a founder father, and a servant of founding fathers, seems to miss the main point, and is rather shallow. It is like if a person follows the will of another so perfectly, he can become like an image of the other person in the mirror.

This is what the Bible is basically stating about Jesus. John 6: 38, “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” Humans were made in the image of God, but they destroyed that image by sin. However, according to Christianity, Jesus is the only sinless person, so the only perfect image of God.

This means, he can be called as God, son of God, servant of God, or Word of God, and none of this title contradicts each other if they are understood in a deeper spiritual way. But the title which is least subject to misunderstanding is the Word of God, and that is why John starts with it. Word of any person is an expression of that person.

The Word of God revealed to prophets, but this word found practical manifestation in the form of Jesus. So he becomes a living Word of God. For example, God wants us to love each other; this was revealed to prophets in the old testament.

Now Jesus became a perfect expression of this love, and thus the Word was made flesh. The written words of revelation found practical expression in the life of Jesus. From a biblical perspective, it would seem meaningless to argue if Jesus is God or not, as that would miss the deeper spiritual point being made here.

It would be like arguing if Lincoln is a founding father or not. There seems to be more emphasis on words used than the meaning of those words. It does not matter, which words are used, as long as it is conveyed that Jesus is the Word of God, a perfect image of the will of God on earth.

Apart from the Word of God getting manifested in the form of a human, there is also a concept of experience of God. Here again, the experience of God is not separate from God, and not identical to God. This is nicely summarized by in John 1:14, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

It may be noted that the experience of the Holy Spirit is called Shekhinah in Jewish, which is related to the word Sakinah in Islam. It can be argued that any word religion is based on three concepts, a source of truth, expression of that source, and experience of that source.

This is in Christianity God the Father, Word of God, and Spirit of God. The kind of trinity that the Bible discusses, is not special to Christianity but seems to be common to most religions of the world.

Jacobsen: What is the Spiritual Trinity? Is it related to the Biblical Trinity?

Faizal: Now the expression of Trinity in the Bible can lead to a spiritual realization and relation with God. This can be called as the Spiritual Trinity. When it is realized that Jesus is the expression of Word of God in human form, the best realization of the will of God, then the way to get closer to God, would be to imitate the example of Jesus.

John 17:21, “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Coming back to the example of the mirror, if you cannot see the source but only the image in a mirror, and you want to be close to the source, then the best you can do is to be close to the image of the source in the mirror.

This way you can become an image of the image of the source. This means by becoming the image of Jesus, you can also become an indirect Word of God. This is why followers of Jesus can be called as adopted children of God.

Jacobsen: What is the Theological Trinity? Is it how Theologians understand the Trinity?

Faizal: It should first be realized that the main biblical idea that Jesus is the Word of God, is not rejected by any Christian sect including Unitarians. Also in Christianity, the body and soul of Jesus is created in time, but it is like a vessel carrying the Word of God.

Just like the flames, which Moses saw on the mount Mount Sinai, where created but expressed the Word of God, the body and soul of Jesus is created and carries the Word of God. The main difference between theological Trinitarians and theological Unitarian churches is on the issue of the eternity of this Word of God.

According to Unitarians, the Word of God is created and according to Trinitarians, both the Word of God and Spirit of God are not created temporally. It may be noted that God still causally precedes them, but just not temporally.

However, it is important to realize that even though this can be motivated from the Bible, as one of its interpretations, it is not directly related to either the Biblical Trinity, or spiritual experience of the Trinity. It is rather a philosophical statement about the eternity of the Word of God. So theologically trinity is just an assertion that the Word of God is not created in time.

It may be noted that in the first council of Nicaea in 325, the following words were included in the creed: “But those who say: ‘There was a time when he was not;’ and ‘He was not before he was made;’ and ‘He was made out of nothing,’ or ‘He is of another substance’ or ‘essence,’ or ‘The Son of God is created,’ or ‘changeable,’ or ‘alterable’ — they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.”

These words were later left out in the first council of Constantinople in 381. But these words make it very clear that the main reason to formulate this creed, was a debate on the eternity of the Word of God. Such a debate on the eternity of Word of God also exists in Islam, with the only difference that Word of God becomes the Quran in Islam, as it becomes Christ in Christianity.

Here Sunnis take a Trinitarians like the view that the Word of God is eternal, and Shias take a Unitarian like the view that the Word of God is created in time. Even in Judaism, the Word of God is expressed to Moses through the burning bush. So Christ in Christianity, is exactly like the burning bush in Judaism, and Quran in Islam.

Jacobsen: How do these Theologians Linguistically define the Trinity? Is that what you mean by the Linguistic Trinity?

Faizal: As the early church developed out of a debate on the eternity of Word of God, language was chosen to make this point clear and unambiguous. This was done by using the word “God” for God the creator of heavens and earth, the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

To distinguish between the creator of heavens and earth from his Word and Spirit, the creator of heavens and earth was called God the Father. However, in common language, the word ‘God’ referees to only the creator of heavens and earth.

This is the main source of confusion in understanding Christian theology. As in Christianity, the theological use of the word ‘God’ is different from the common use of the word ‘God’. In common language the word ‘God’ only referees to ‘God the Father’, of Christian theology. In Christian theology, the statement “Jesus is God,” basically means that Jesus is the Word of God, and the Word of God is not created in time but it is eternal.

However, this statement is often misunderstood, as the word ‘God’ in common language only referees to the created of heavens and earth, or God the Father. It is important for Christians to understand this difference between the theological language and common language to understand the theological Trinity.

The interesting thing here is that unlike theological trinity, the biblical trinity, is not a statement about philosophy, but a spiritual statement that can improve a person’s relation with God.

It is also interesting to note that in the Bible such fluidity in the use of language seemed to be allowed by Jesus himself. John 10:34,35,36, “Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods”’? If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came — and Scripture cannot be set aside — what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?”

Here Jesus seems to argue that the language can be used in a flexible way, and the word ‘god’ can be used for others than the God the Father, who created heavens and earth. He basically argues that if people who were given the Word of God can be called gods, then the one who is a manifestation of that Word of God can be called the son of God.

The real important thing to understand here is the main difference between theological and common use of the word ‘God’. In common use the word ‘God’ referees to the creator of heavens and earth, who is called God the Father in theological language.

In theological language, the word ‘God’ referees to all those who are not created in time, and are eternal, and so includes ‘the common notion of God’ along with his Word and Spirit.

Jacobsen: There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding of the Trinity. Many Christians do not see the Trinity this way. How would you describe the common misunderstandings of Trinity?

Faizal: Now we come to the common ways Trinity is misunderstood, and the spiritual problems it creates. I would say that the Trinity is usually misunderstood as either modalism or tritheism. Now, this is not done at a linguistic level, but a physiological and spiritual level. So, I would say that spiritual modalism and spiritual tritheism are the most common misunderstandings of the Trinity.

Jacobsen: What is Spiritual Modalism?

Faizal: As the theological use of the word ‘God’ referees to God the creator of heavens and earth, his Word and his Spirit, and the common use of the word ‘God’ only referees to the creator of heavens and earth, a common misunderstanding of theological trinity is that the Word of God is tautologically equated to God the Father, who created the heavens and earth.

In other words, in Christianity, the statement ‘Jesus is God’ means, that Jesus is the Word of God, this Word of God is eternal and not created in time. This is like the Quran in Islam, and burning bush in Judaism. However, due to the difference between the common and theological use of the word ‘God’, this statement is misunderstood to mean that Jesus is God the Father.

Now, this might not be done linguistically, but it is done physiologically and hence spiritually. Spiritual modalism is one of the main problems in Christianity, and it occurs directly due to an overemphasis on the language of early church father and less emphasis on the language used in the Bible.

It is hard to fall into spiritual modalism, if the language used in the Bible is emphasized, where Jesus is called the Word of God. The biblical spirituality is summarized in John 14:6, “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Here Jesus is the way, and the destination is God the Father.

I may add that the light to walk on the way is the Holy Spirit, and the Bible is the pointer to Jesus. But in spiritual modalism, Jesus is the destination, and the Bible is the way and truth. This also is the same with prayers.

According to the Bible, the prayers are to be directed to the heavenly Father, in the name of Word, and getting motivated by the Holy Spirit. In other words, you pray to our Heavenly Father, like Jesus, that not our will but the will of our Heavenly Father be done.

Then you experience Holy Spirit, and develop a closeness to our Heavenly Father. To truly experience Holy Spirit, you need to walk on the path, which is Jesus and pray like him, and by walking on that path you end up directing your focus on God the Father, who created the heavens and earth.

As Jesus is the perfect image of God the Father, by following him, you experience the Holy Spirit, and by experience the Holy Spirit, you come closer to the heavenly Father. In spiritual modalism, all this is messed up, Jesus is tautologically equated to the Father, so you end up praying to Jesus or the Holy Spirit, with no role for the Heavenly Father.

This is a physiological mess and a spiritual mess, and occurs due to direct neglect of language used in the Bible. It may be noted in Christianity, the statement used to describe Jesus is that ‘Jesus is God’, and the position of spiritual modalism can be described as ‘God is Jesus’.

Again going back to the example of the burning bush of Moses. Moses could have said, that he talked to God in the burning bush, but he would never say ‘God is a burning bush on Mount

Sinai'. In the same way as Jesus is a perfect image of God, it can be said 'Jesus is God', but you cannot say 'God is Jesus', just as you cannot say 'God is a burning bush'.

Going back to the simple example of an image in the mirror. If you see an image of Lincoln in the mirror, or his perfect picture, you can point to that picture and say that he is Lincoln. But it will be absurd to say Lincoln is an image in a mirror, or a photo in your pocket.

In other words, the statement that the picture is Lincoln is correct, but is foolish to say Lincoln is a picture. In the same way, it is correct to say Jesus is God, but it wrong to say God is Jesus.

Jacobsen: What is Spiritual Tritheism?

Faizal: Another misunderstanding which occurs in theological Trinity. It is when Jesus is viewed as a different god, from God the Father. Physiologically, again Jesus is not seen as the Word of God, but as a separate independent God. This again does not occur at a linguistic level, but at a spiritual level, and can be called as spiritual tritheism.

In other words, in Christianity theology, the word 'God' denotes God the creator, his Word, and his Spirit. However, when Word of God is called 'God', it means that it is eternal and not created in time. It represents the will of God, and this Word takes a practical manifestation in the form of Jesus.

However, as the word 'God' is commonly used for the creator of heavens and earth, this statement is misunderstood to mean that Jesus is an independent god, and God the creator is one among three gods. This again produces confusion in terms of the spiritual relationship with God, as Jesus is in this cases viewed as a god besides God the Father, and not as the Word of God, a perfect image God the Father, and a way to the Heavenly Father.

A simple example of a mirror will help understand this point again. You can look at the picture of Lincoln in the mirror and say this is Lincoln, but it will be nonsensical to say that the picture is an independent Lincoln and the mirror image of Lincoln is yet another independent Lincoln. In other words, it will not make any sense to say Lincoln is one among three Lincolns.

In the same way, you can say Jesus is God, as he is the Word of God, but you cannot say God is one among three gods. As there is only one God, and the word theologically word 'God' is also used for the Holy Spirit and Word of God to show that they are eternal and not created, and biblically the Word of God denotes his will, which is perfectly manifestation in the form of Jesus, just as it was manifested before as a burning bush.

Jacobsen: What is the Quranic approach to Christianity.

Faizal: I would like to differentiate the Quranic approach to Christianity, from the response of Muslims theologians. Muslim theology developed from the Quran, just like Christian theology developed from the Bible. However, the Quranic view of Christianity seems to be more profound, and deeper than that developed by Muslim theologians.

Jacobsen: The main source of confusion and disagreement starts from the idea that in Christianity, God has a son, and in Islam God has no son. Should we discuss that even before, we do in details of Trinity?

Faizal: I agree that before discussion Quranic View on Trinity, it is important to clarify the meaning of the words 'Walad of God' and 'Ibn of God', both of which are sometimes translated

as ‘Son of God’. Walad is a word which has a direct sexual meaning. It most closely resembles the word “biological son of God” or “sexually produced a son of God’.”

Now as it can also mean begotten, a derivative of this word has been used by Arab Christians in their creedal statement. However, as this word sounds really sexual, this word is not commonly used by the Arab Christians. They rather use the word Ibn, which means son in the sense of a parental relationship of love.

However, as Christianity spread in Arabia when the debate on the eternity of Word of God was still active, they ended up using a derivative of Walad in their creedal statement. This would have sounded very bad to pagan Arabs, and they would have misunderstood Christianity to mean that God has a biological son.

It was in this context that the Quran criticized the use of the Word Walad. Quran 6: 101, “To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: How can He have a Walad (biological son) when He hath no consort? He created all things, and He hath full knowledge of all things.” However, as this is not a Christian position, never does the Quran say that Christian says that God has a Walad.

Quran addresses these people, but never calls them Christians, as this is not a Christian position. As an example, Quran 2:116, “They say: “(God) hath begotten a Walad (biological son)”: Glory be to Him. -Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: everything renders worship to Him.”

On the other hand, the Quran says very clearly that Jews and Christians use the word Ibn both for themselves as Children of God, and Jesus or even Ezra. To understand each of these verses, we need some context.

The first verses criticize few Jews and Christians at the time of Muhammad, who claim to be chosen of God, his beloved, his Children, but do not lead a righteous life. Quran 5:18, “(Both) the Jews and the Christians say: “We are Ibna (sons) of God, and his beloved.” Say: “Why then doth He punish you for your sins?...” Here clearly Quran makes two points, it clearly says that Jews and Christians use the word Ibn (sons) in a relationship sense, which can mean beloved.

Quran also states that those who do not lead a righteous life cannot be called children of God, just as Bible mentions in John 3:10, “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.”

In summary Ibn (son) of God can mean his beloved of God. Now we come to the verses, where the Quran says, Christian use the word ibn for Jesus. Quran 9: 30,31, “The Jews call ‘Ezra (ibn) son of God, and the Christians call Christ (ibn) son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God’s curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth! They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of God, and Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One God. there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him).”

To understand this verse, we first note that Ezra is called as the father of Judaism, as it was due to his efforts that Judaism took its present form. In other words, Ezra is someone that Jews should follow to be good Jews, and Jesus is someone that Christians should follow to be good Christians.

However, for those people who only say they follow them by their tongue and actually follow their priests and anchorites, they are only saying with their tongue what is not in their heart. This is what seems to be criticized here.

This is a general pattern in Quran, that it criticizes those people who say something with their tongue, which is not in their heart, for example, in Quran 63:1, “When the Hypocrites come to thee, they say, ‘We bear witness that thou art indeed the Messenger of God.’ Yea, God knoweth that thou art indeed His Messenger, and God beareth witness that the Hypocrites are indeed liars.”

To understand this verse better from a Muslim perspective, it will be helpful if the son is replaced by beloved, as the previous verses already show both are somehow related. Then this verse could be read as “The Jews call ‘Ezra beloved of God, and the Christians call Christ beloved of God. That is a saying from their mouth; They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of God....”

The main point here is that the Quran does not seem to have a criticism of Ibn like Walad, and Quran never said Christians use the word Walad for Jesus. Quran always seems to refer to people that those people who use the word Walad as such without calling them Christians, as Walad (biological son) of God is not a Christian position. Quran does criticize those Christians who just say they follow Jesus, but actually, do not live a righteous life, and rather live as children of the devil (according to the Bible).

So, in general, we should use to translate the word Walad as a biological son rather than a son. This will refer to those Arab Christians who use such a word in their creed, and basically tell them not to use it, in a cultural context, where it can be seen sexually.

Jacobsen: What is Qurans stance on Biblical Trinity?

Faizal: Quran fully affirms biblical Trinity. Quran seems to be more Trinitarian than even the Bible in this context, as it clearly mentions Jesus as the Word of God, something which is only mentioned indirectly in the Bible.

Quran 3:45, “Behold! the angels said: “O Mary! God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God.”

Quran 2: 253, “Those apostles We endowed with gifts, some above others: To one of them Allah spoke; others He raised to degrees (of honor); to Jesus, the son of Mary We gave clear (Signs), and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit... This is much more direct than what is found in the Bible.”

Jacobsen: What is Quran’s stance on the Theological Trinity?

Faizal: The Theological Trinity deals with the eternity of the Word of God. It is interesting to note that the Quran does not discuss theological trinity at all. There seems to be no discussion of this topic at all.

This might also be the reason that Muslims, have later debated this topic again, with the only difference that the Word of God becomes the Quran in Islam. However, it is interesting to note that the Quran does use the word ‘Word of God’ for Jesus too.

Jacobsen: What is Qurans stance on the Linguistic Trinity?

Faizal: Quran has a mild criticism of the language used by church father for describing trinity. Quran basically tells Christians, that if you want to say Jesus is the Word of God, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, use the biblical language, and say that directly.

It advises them to avoid such language, that can lead to spiritual modalism and spiritual tritheism. However, the criticism seems to more like advice, and not a very sharp criticism like Quran has for spiritual modalism and spiritual tritheism. Quran 4:171, “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not “three”: desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God. Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a Walad (biological son). To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs.”

Now here first the verse tells Christians not to commit excess in their religion, not follow a different religion. Then it goes on to describe biblical trinity, with God, his Word, and his Spirit. It goes even further than the Bible and directly states that Jesus is the Word of God.

This is followed by advice that it will be better to not use the language of early church father, and it will be better for you as Christians if you stick to biblical language. However, it does not claim if this language is used, it will be an offense for which they will be punished. The problem is that it can lead to an offense in the form of spiritual modalism and spiritual tritheism

Jacobsen: What is Qurans stance on Spiritual Trinity?

Faizal: Quran praises the early followers of Jesus, and advises people who believe in the Quran to follow their example. These people did derive spiritual inspiration from a spiritual trinity. Quran 61:14, “O ye who believe! Be ye helpers of God. As said Jesus the son of Mary to the Disciples, ‘Who will be my helpers to God.’ Said the disciples, ‘We are God’s helpers!’.”

Quran also advises Christians to follow the gospels and warns those who do not follow it properly. Quran 5:47, “Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what God hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel.”

Jacobsen: Now we can discuss what Qurans stance is on misunderstandings of the Trinity. The first thing, what is Quran’s stance on Spiritual Modalism?

Faizal: Now as we discussed, in Christianity it is stated that Jesus is God, just like a picture of Lincoln can be called Lincoln. But Lincoln is not a picture, God is not Jesus. In summary, we can say Jesus is God, as this can mean that he is the Word of God, and a perfect image of God the Father.

But God is not Jesus, and this would mean that the creator of heavens and earth is identified with his image. This is interesting as the Quran criticizes the idea that God is Jesus, and not Jesus is God. Quran 5:72, “They do blaspheme who say: ‘God is Christ the son of Mary.’” The verse here is very interesting. As it exactly mentions spiritual modalism.

It criticizes the statement ‘God is Jesus’ and not ‘Jesus is God,’ as the statement ‘Jesus is God’ can mean that Jesus is the Word of God, but “‘God is Jesus’” can only mean that the Heavenly Father is Jesus. Only if a person is psychologically and spiritually following modalism, can he utter such a statement? This is what the Quran criticizes.

Jacobsen: After Spiritual Modalism, I would like to ask you about Spiritual Tritheism. What is the Quran's stance on Spiritual Tritheism?

Faizal: Christianity states that Jesus is an image of the Heavenly father as he is the Word of God made flesh and not some independent god besides God the Father. Rather he is a perfect image of God, and can be thus called as God, son of God, servant of God, or Word of God. The idea that Jesus is an independent god besides God, would mean that God is one among three gods.

This is the idea that the Quran strongly rejects. Quran 5:73, "They do blaspheme who say: God is the third of three: for there is no god except One God..." Again summarizing the problem of spiritual tritheism.

The idea that Jesus was some independent god, different and independent from the Heavenly Father, is strongly criticized in the Quran, but the idea that Jesus was Word of God is totally affirmed by the Quran. It may be noted that this criticize is spiritual and not theological, as Quran criticizes those who take Jesus and Mary as gods besides God in Quran 5:116.

This cannot be a criticism of theology as Mary is not considered divine in any Christian theology, so it has to be understood as a spiritual criticize of tritheism, where Jesus is physiologically taken as a god besides Heavenly Father, and not as the Word of the Heavenly Father.

The main biblical idea that Jesus is the Word of God, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, is fully supported by the Quran and stated in more clear terms than even the Bible.

Jacobsen: Can you summarize your views on discussed here?

Faizal: Yes, I can summarize these findings here:

1. In Bible Trinity, refers to Jesus being the Word of God, which is the way to walk on, if you want to reach the Heavenly Father. The spirit provides the strength to walk on this way, and the end goal is to reach the Heavenly Father.
2. This provides a spiritual understanding, where a person prays as Jesus prayed that the will of the Heavenly Father be done and not his own will, and is strengthened by the Holy Spirit in that process. This is the spiritual trinity.
3. There is a theological Trinity, where it is stated that the Word of God eternal and not created in time.
4. There is a linguistic expression of Trinity, where the word 'God' is used for not only, God the creator, but also his Word and his Spirit. This is done to emphasize the eternity of the Word of God.
5. The misunderstanding of linguistic expression of Trinity can lead to spiritual modalism and spiritual tritheism.
6. Quran supports biblical and spiritual trinity. Quran does not comment on the theological Trinity. Quran mildly advises against the linguistic expression of the Trinity, as they can lead to modalism and tritheism. Quran strongly criticizes spiritual modalism and spiritual tritheism. Quran also criticizes the use of dirty words for God, such as a biological son (Walad) of God. However, the Quran never says that Christians say God has a biological son (Walad).

7. In summary, Christianity is as monotheistic as Judaism and Islam, with just a different linguistic expression for its monotheistic beliefs.
8. Muslims should know that when Christians say Jesus is God, they just mean Jesus is Word of God, and Word of God is eternal. If they want to ask Christians, if they consider Jesus as God in the way the word God is understood in common language, they should ask them if Jesus is the Heavenly Father, who created the heavens and earth, and they will get the answer is negative.
9. Christians should avoid the words like Son of God, as Muslims might understand it in biological terms. They can find common terms, like Word of God for Jesus, and Creator for Heavens Father, and they can find common ground to talk to each other.
10. Here we have argued that the Quran can be reinterpreted in a way that it promotes a deeper understanding of Christianity, rather than its rejection. As Quran states in 5:48 To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety... So Quran is an explanation, guard and affirmation of the Bible and not a negation of the Bible.

Sometimes, in Islamic theology, this point has been missed. For example, the identification of Holy Spirit with Gabriel in Islamic theology seems to miss the point that if Quran used it in a Christian context (in relation with Jesus), its meaning has to be restricted to what Christians would understand from it. Similarly, sometimes Christians seem to be too fixed on the use words, that they do not focus on the meaning of those words. However, the concept of God in Christianity is similar to the concept of God in Judaism and Islam. So Christianity is monotheistic like Judaism and Islam.

Jacobsen: Thank you very much, Dr. Faizal, these views may help build bridges between Christianity and Islam, having a theological reconciliation can help build a way for political reconciliation, and will help the cause of peace in the world.

From CERN: “So Forgettable, in Every Way...”

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 12, 2019

BBC News reported on the ousting of Professor Alessandro Strumia.

CERN is the major particle accelerator of the world and, at least, Europe of the early 21st century so far. It has an important status in the world of science. Within this framework for understanding the world of science, we can see its intersection with the world of politics and social views.

Indeed, Strumia was a guest professor. He stood by the remarks. The statements that had him ousted from this particular scientific community.

“Some people hated hearing about higher male variance: this idea comes from Darwin, like other offensive ideas that got observational support... Science is not about being offended when facts challenge ideas held as sacred...” Strumia opined, “For months, Cern kept ‘investigating’ if my 30-minute talk might have violated Cern rules [requiring an] ‘obligation to exercise reserve and tact in expressing personal opinions and communication to the public’,” Prof Strumia said.

He argued on the position that procedure was not followed in his case. In that, if a standard procedure had been followed, then this would have “never happened,” in his opinion.

Strumia, in September of 2018, said that physics is not by invitation and was built by men. This was during a workshop presentation. Within the workshop, probably for humorous effect but not coming off in the end as he may have liked, Strumia included cartoons with jokes about the campaigns for equality in science by women.

In Strumia’s analysis and argument, he considered women physicists not as good as the male counterparts within the community.

Strumia argued, “Extra checks confirmed that my results are correct and in line with the specialized literature... This will be shown in a scientific paper, if it can appear.”

In that, he was arguing that his research or views were not being permitted, or potentially would not be allowed, to be published within academic journals, based on the conclusions of the analysis and research.

CERN, in a public statement, said:

The incident was investigated in light of the internal Rules and Regulations and the Organisation’s Code of Conduct, which is based on Cern’s core values... As a result of its own investigation and following the decision taken by the University of Pisa, Cern decided not to extend Professor Strumia’s status of Guest Professor... Cern reaffirms its commitment to the paramount importance of respect and diversity in the workplace.

A physicist from Imperial College London, Dr. Jessica Wade, was present at the workshop during the time of the controversial remarks of Strumia. Wade considers the statement, by CERN, an important and “powerful message” for the scientists of the world. Of course, others will see as, certainly, powerful, but a silencing effect on scientists who may disagree or present socially controversial views.

Wade said, “Well-funded senior academics should not use their of power to attack colleagues or demean the work of women.”

Based on an analysis of some papers available with a database of research on particle physics, Strumia constructed a series of graphs for the workshop or the presentation. In it, more women were shown to be hired than men; even though, in the research citation listing, the men may have had more citations. More citations tend to imply greater quality, as the implication.

BBC News stated, “This evidence, he said indicated that men produced better research than women. But a group of physicists posted their take on the analysis at particlesforjustice.org and stated that they believed it to be ‘fundamentally unsound.’ They said the correlation was a reflection of the difficulties faced by women in research rather than their abilities.”

One example statement of this is given in the fact that more men are present in particle physics and, therefore, more men will cite colleagues who are men. This becomes especially true for the most prominent and more senior researchers within the field of research of particle physics.

Most of these senior researchers and physicists are men who have built long-term careers for themselves. This, in turn, presents the issue of the social facets of science on another level of analysis. As noted in the article, a disproportionately higher number of women leave the field of particle physics.

“Prof. Strumia is not an expert on these topics and is misusing his physics credentials to put himself forward as one. Those among us who are familiar with the relevant literature know that Strumia’s conclusions are in stark disagreement with those of experts,” BBC News concluded, “He frequently made the basic error of conflating correlation with causation, and while Strumia claimed to be proving that there is no discrimination against women, his arguments were rooted in a circumscribed, biased reading of the data available, to the point of promoting a perspective that is biased against women.”

Chat with Boluwatife Ishola on Nigeria, Class, and Human Rights

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 13, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is your background? What was family life for you growing up?

Boluwatife Ishola: I am from a polygamous home, a family of 15, am the seventh born of my dad.

Jacobsen: How is religion influential in Nigerian life?

Ishola: Religion is the major influencer of an average Nigeria is arguably the most religious country in the world. An average Nigeria Christian, for example, depends on his or her pastor for instruction on what to eat, drink and wear and sometimes who to marry.

Jacobsen: What are the crucial factors in building an early education about Nigerian society?

Ishola: I think the major factor in building an early education will be when the government or any international humanitarian organization invest heavily in education and are ready to train and employ competent staff as well as pay them a salary when due.

Even the religious organization influence the political class, religious and political leader are to blame for Nigeria woes and corrupt politicians who loot money and pay 10% as a tithe to their religious leaders.

I think the major factor in building an early education will be when the government or any international humanitarian organization invest heavily in education and are ready to train and employ competent staff as well as pay them a salary when due.

For example, Nigeria public universities have been on strike for 91 days. Because of the lack of salary. The government should build good schools and then finance them well.

Jacobsen: What are the ways in which class is a factor in one's outcomes in life?

Ishola: I think class sometimes determine your outcome in life if your parent is from the upper class in Nigeria, things become easier for you, they will reserve the best position in government companies for you.

Jacobsen: What are the main human rights issues in Nigeria?

Ishola: The main human rights issue here. There is no freedom of expression here. Government lockup opposition voices. Human right is not right here. There are cases of rape, abduction. A rapist can move freely. Security of the lives of citizens are threatened every day

Jacobsen: How are these struggles core to the struggles of lower-class Nigerians and women and girls in particular?

Ishola: There are terrorist attacks. In the northeast and northwest part of Nigeria, the lower class and women are the helpless group in Nigeria. They are often the major sufferers of government's bad policy.

Jacobsen: What makes education a class issue in Nigeria?

Ishola: If you are poor in Nigeria, you are despised.

Jacobsen: Who are the major players in Nigeria who are known to be corrupt and known to make life difficult for other Nigerians?

Ishola: The major player in Nigeria known to be corrupt are the political class there are recent cases of politician looting 1 billion dollars. The major player in Nigeria known to be corrupt are the political class there are recent cases of politician looting 1 billion dollars.

Capitalist businesspeople too are corrupt. They exploit the masses through exorbitant profit
They also refuse to remit taxes. Another corrupt group is Nigeria Pentecostal church leaders.

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

FREE HEARTS, FREE MINDS (FHFM)

Rise of Singaporean Ex-Muslims

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 15, 2019

According to Mothership, there is an increase in the rate of growth of the Singaporean ex-Muslims in the world alongside the developments of a growth in atheists, publicly at least.

One man (25), Rahim (pseudonym), tried to practice faithfully as a Muslim with five daily prayers, travelling to Mosque for prayers on Friday, and the attendance at various religious classes in order to build and fortify personal faith.

Rahim renounced Islam in 2016 and became an atheist. He thought of leaving the religion while on the prayer mat and thinking, “What if God doesn’t want me to pray?” 80% of Singaporeans believe in some religion or another with 18.5% having no formal religion with an increase of 3% since 2000.

As reported, “Now, there are more Singaporeans with no religion than there are Hindus (five per cent), Taoists (10 per cent) and Muslims (14 per cent). Despite the rising trend, some atheists, including Rahim, remain closeted.”

He – Rahim – noted the inability to come out to parents because of the “strong and traditional” background of the family bound to the religion. He was “very pious” as a teenager and used to become highly defensive with critiques of religion.

“There came a point where I was praying but I got distracted because I would be afraid that things would happen suddenly, since I attend to emergencies,” Rahim stated, “For a while, he was able to put aside those “harmful” thoughts and tried to focus on his relationship with God, only to realise that he couldn’t do it anymore. While performing his prayers on one of those days, a voice in his head said: “What if God doesn’t want me to pray?”

That was the day of hanging the prayer mat for good and leaving the faith. For missing prayers within the faith, especially coming from a strong traditional religious family, it amounts to not being a Muslim anymore. It is part of the community ethic and mores.

They will tell this to one another. If someone is unable to account for their prayers, community ethic may necessitate a talking to, and a certain form of chastisement as not quite Muslim or not Islamic enough because of the lack of a formal prayer life.

Rahim said, “There’s this school of thought that says you cannot miss your prayer. If not, you’re not a Muslim. My mother also stressed that point to me, so I guess I bought into the idea and tried to pray religiously but found that very hard.”

Rahim talked about the month of Ramadan as a hellish experience for many Muslims because of the fasting and the way one has to drink and eat if they do. He is lucky to be able to pass off as a non-Muslim Indian in public, which is not a form of fortune for every other person known to him or within his circle.

“The hard part is waking up (for predawn meals) because it disrupts my body clock. If I was a Muslim, I would see no problem waking up at 5am and going through my day as per normal. But because I don’t believe in it anymore, I feel more tired from the day,” Rahim, speaking of Ramadan, stated.

All this built into the general story of apostasy of Rahim. It seems like a general sense of anguish and confusion when the faith tenets become less tenable or completely so, such is life. He felt comfortable in telling strangers and friends about the apostasy, but not the conservative family.

He tried to tell his mother twice about leaving the faith. She brushed this off – only taking the questioning seriously when she found some social media posts critical of religion in general. The mom sat with the son and tried to have a civil, calm conversation about the nature of the faith and the apostasy.

He said, “She told me that I was confused and wanted me to attend more religious lectures. To me, that was absurd so I told her that I won’t go.” The mother branded the brother and Rahim as “useless” in the light of the apostasy, such is the nature of religious privilege in societies all over the world, including Canada.

His mother acted in this manner because several people were placing pressure on his mom. The group were against the idea of apostasy or of leaving/formally renouncing Islam by young Rahim. This is the form of cultural and social pressure and opprobrium used to keep young nonbelievers in line around the world in different ways and to different degrees.

“This, however, doesn’t seem to be an isolated case to just the Muslim community. In a study by the Institute of Policy Studies, Muslims Singaporeans and Christians Singaporeans were found to be more conservative towards moral issues,” Mothership reported, “His relatives, whom he claims to live all over the world, were the ones who discovered his social media posts and sent screenshots of them to his mother. And instead of advising her gently, they shamed her for raising him to be the person he is today.”

Yasmine Mohammed in the Toronto Sun

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 19, 2019

The Toronto Sun reported that the hijab can be seen in a variety of ways. For example, it can be seen as a symbol of oppression and as a itemized individual choice.

According to FHF Founder, Yasmine Mohammed, the burkini in Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition. Her sensibility on the issue, of the hijab and seeing the presentation in the burkini and elsewhere, is an overarching feeling of betrayal.

“Growing up as a first-generation Canadian to a fundamentalist Muslim family, I spent a lot of time being caught in between two worlds,” Mohammed stated, “This dichotomy was most pronounced when it came to feminism.”

She saw feminism as a means of hope, as a way to see beyond that which was taught in a fundamentalist home. A home life devoid of the freedom to choose what one does or does not wear.

“At home I was taught that, and nine years old, I needed to wear a hijab to protect myself from men who wanted to molest me,” Mohammed said.

She was told that this was victim-blaming. That is to say, it is only the virtuous girls, rather than the corrupted and somehow unclean ones, who did not wear the hijab.

She chose to break free from this restrictive environment, which was, at root, an area of repression of Mohammed. She did not like it. However, on her way out of it, she almost lost her – and her daughter’s – life.

Mohammed said, “I’m grateful that unlike Aqsa Parvez, a teenager from Mississauga, my family were not able to follow through on the threat to kill me for removing my hijab. I was able to escape with my daughter. But where have I escaped to? I have escaped to the upside down.”

She sees the society fled to as, in some sense, a “mirage” or where the clothing used to oppress her are found in corporate ads of “Gap, Mattel, Nike,” and Sports Illustrated.

Mohammed asked, “Why are we suddenly celebrating religious modesty culture? Isn’t that the very thing feminists have been fighting against for centuries? How is it now suddenly something positive?”

Ashe does not like the direction of the ads in the western corporations nor the ways in which these represent something that she deems oppressive and used for oppression throughout the world. The questions arise about the application of this media principle to other religions.

Do other religions have representation in other parts of the media landscape?

“But you never see Mormon underwear on the Victoria’s Secret runway. You never see any other religious clothing being fetishized like the hijab and to such a nonsensical degree,” Mohammed stated, “L’Oreal had a hijabi model for their shampoo ads. Shampoo. You can’t see the model’s hair. In their frantic zeal to celebrate the hijab they do the most ridiculous and confusing things.”

She sees a misunderstanding in the perception of religious symbolisms as inherently benign, and in this case too – with the hijab. The fundamentalist sectors around the world wanting to impose their theocratic image on the rest of the world becomes the central point and issue for Mohammed, who speaks from the experience of living within a fundamentalist home.

“Across the world, if women try to remove it, they can be abused, imprisoned or even killed. There is nothing benign about it. Despite the fact that it is a tool of misogyny seeped in oppression that perpetuates rape culture, every woman should be free to wear it. A woman can choose to partake in her own subjugation; that is her right,” Mohammed said.

This becomes a right to wear something and a celebration of wearing it, in the opinion of Mohammed. The problem is the celebration of the fundamentalist elements throughout the world restricting the rights of women, including the right to wear what they please and when, and how, and under what circumstances, with punishment if disobeyed, and then this in contrast to freer countries in which there is less of it.

Mohammed concluded, “People have the right to tattoo swastikas on their necks, but that is not something that we would celebrate. We would not splash those faces on magazines. It’s an extreme example, but it drives the point home. Individuals have the right to wear hijab if they please, but we certainly should not be splashing it on magazines and on Barbie’s head as if it were a positive thing worthy of being celebrated.”

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (@dearexmuslim).

Changing Our Scripts, Living in Our Stories

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 19, 2019

Shift the Script is launched a website entitled More Than Murtadd in order to create or spark some changemaking religious conversations.

On February 12th, 2019, the website was launched. Its orientation is independent and non-partisan. One of the central purposes is to provide platform for the suffering of some ex-Muslims and questioning Muslims to speak.

In that, there will be the important aspect of another resource for ex-Muslims to speak their minds. It provides a basis for those who may have left the religion or who are questioning the religion to question it.

It is, in a manner of speaking, a means by which to encourage dialogue and to garner a safer space for ex-Muslims to express their opinions without social reproval or, sometimes, death threats.

A spokesperson for More Than Murtadd explained, “A majority of Sunni Muslims have been deceived by a minority of Sunni Muslims for more than 1000 years regarding the Sunnah of Sunni Islam and the Qur’an having had no credibility or authority for more than 1000 years, and all this can be proven in an investigation unveiling a unique combination of 3 fundamental facts to the global public through More than Murtadd. Governments will understand the intentions responsible for selective teaching based on the most important oral tradition of Sunni Islam.”

Within the framework of Shift the Script, More Than Murtadd is seen as a means by which to connect and build bridges with the facets of the organization in its larger overall framework. It is a service for a community but for public understanding, insofar as I can tell.

Some of the issues for ex-Muslims is broken families and fractured homes over the disagreements on the nature of the world and the reliance on religion or not. The basis for the title of the website – “More Than Murtadd” – comes from the term “Murtadd,” which, in Islamic law, is an apostate from Islam with the punishments of banishment and then death based on the law.

The Central Council of Ex-Muslims in Germany beginning in 2007 was the foundation of much of the modern organized ex-Muslim movement. Now, there are many, many councils, groups, and online organizations devoted to community for those who may be fleeing or who simply have been banished by their former community of the faithful.

As reported, “More Than Murtadd is the next step for the ex-Muslim movement. While fighting for the rights of all ex-Muslims to be safe and outspoken, it asks all people from all walks of life as ex-Muslim, Muslim, and non-Muslim, to see and realise what you need to know but have been denied, inviting everyone to demonstrate how we are all connected.”

Online resources:

More than Murtadd

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (@dearexmuslim).

The LGBTQ+, Reformers, Ex-Muslims, and Zionists Walk Into a Conference

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 19, 2019

There will be a conference of ex-Muslims, Zionists, and LGBTQ+ people, among others. It is the British Islam conference taking place between February 23 and 24, New Horizons in British Islam is the host of the conference and the organizer.

2016 was the year of the grant awarded to the British Islam Conference by the Aziz Foundation. The conference organizers state that there will be the encouragement of the development of “British Muslims thought, identity and culture” with the promotion of open and inclusive debate and discussion look to the future.

Now, the speakers may not represent the views of New Horizons. Some prominent speakers will display a wide range of views for the respectful discussions and debates with ex-Muslims and others coming together for dialogue.

Sherin Khankan who runs the Mariam Mosque will be present. The purpose of the Marian Mosque is to openly challenge the patriarchal structure and male domination on scriptural interpretation and authority.

Rabia Mirza will be present, who is the Director of Media, Engagement and Lobbying for British Muslims for Secular Democracy. A Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sunderland, Andrew Dalton, will be present. Dalton is a well-known for LGBTQI+ activism.

A prominent spokesperson for the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (CEMB), Sadia Hameed, will also be present. Imamm Asim Hafiz will also be present, who is the Islamic Religious Adviser to the Chief of the Defense Staff at the UK Ministry of Defence.

Others are stated, “Dr Usama Hasan is the Head of Islamic Studies at the controversial Quilliam International organisation in London. And Laura Marks is the Zionist founder of Mitzvah Day and was previously Vice President of the pro-Israel Board of Deputies of British Jews. She is also co-chair of the Nisa-Nashim Jewish-Muslim Women’s Network.”

Confession of an Ex-Muslim: Freedom, Sometimes, Must Be Won Cautiously

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 8, 2019

Yasmine Mohammed, Founder of Free Hearts, Free Minds, was interviewed on World Hijab Day, recently. The interviewer, Ezra Levant, spoke to Mohammed about the World Hijab Day.

Having some personal and historical experience with the hijab and as an ex-Muslim woman, chronicled in Confessions of an Ex-Muslim, and also some experience with the oppression of women in some patriarchal societies who want to leave those specific theocracies, Mohammed is an apt commentator on the subject from this individual perspective.

The conversation and its surrounding commentary in its short accompanying article focused on the feeling of compulsion of many women to wear the hijab rather than simply having the option to make a freely informed choice about whether to wear the garment or not, the head scarf or not.

The fear for many is shunning by community and physical threats. This was a poignant point by Mohammed in the interview, in which she would not necessarily recommend a young woman take off the hijab because of the potential for familial and communal backlash against the act of defiance.

The full interview can be seen [here](#).

From Z to Kay

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 8, 2019

Zara Kay, newly arising online ex-Muslim voice and 26-year-old founder of Faithless Hijabi, has been entering into some of the recent news cycle based on the experience, not uncommon but not the rule, of leaving Islam, as a woman, and then having to fear death threats, social disapproval, epithets, even general violence by those loved ones who only, recently, found out about the disavowal to the faith.

Kay remarked on being called a “slut” simply for removing her hijab. Again, and as has been repeated numerous times, the issue is not the faith or lack thereof, but, rather, the emphasis on the freedom of religion and freedom of belief, implying the freedom from religion and freedom from belief, in which individuals can leave or join religion without fear of violent reprisal. Oftentimes, unfortunately, this comes from the Muslim community against the ex-Muslim community, often simply ex-Muslim individuals who do not want to take part in the culture of Islam anymore – whatever tradition and nationality of Islam this happens to be at that time.

Kay’s questioning began at the time of being an international student in Melbourne in 2012. But she became disillusioned with Sharia Law and found atheism more convincing. She founded Faithless Hijabi at this time. But then, literally, she found ex-Muslims have received hundreds of death threats. She began studying engineering and information technology while an international student. The details of the faith that disturbed her were the parts dealing with anti-woman and anti-gay opinions.

She was born and raised in Tanzania. But, as she lives in Australia now, she knows hundreds of ex-Muslims. Those ex-Muslims living more or less underneath the spotlight of the mainstream of society and hoping for a quiet life away from the ostracization, the abuse, and the brooding sense of a possible murderer around the corner. These are not necessarily far-fetched ideas. But, nonetheless, they are, in fact, the psychological weaponry used to prevent people from leaving a particular faith or from speaking out about some negative experiences within the religion. These are human institutions; as such, these will create misery and suffering, community and disunity, transcendent experiences and bliss in adherents in various ways.

Ex-Muslims, as Kay’s case shows, want what everyone else wants; they want the chance to live their authentic self in the moment, of which is found in immediate expressivity and then within the flow of life permitted to dynamically evolve and grow into something reflective of this hoped-for true self. Something chosen from the inside rather than imposed by the outside. The hijab, in many but not all contexts, can be seen as a symbol of oppression, akin to the oppression of women in Roman Catholic hierarchies with the nuns and their garments around the head, the veil.

These religious habits come with cultures. Sometimes, these help provide a sense of belonging and community, and a sense of purpose; other times, they can be divisive and lead to a destruction of individual lives based on the backlash against those who reject these garments and principles of living, as we see with some parts of some Muslims communities.

Take, for example, the death penalty as an overarching threat for those who choose to leave the religion, which is legalized in 13 countries in the world; in addition to this, we can note the

general ways in which the sociocultural context of leavers or ex-believers can be threatened by their fellow citizens with denial of work, of school, or simply physical threats, where this creates a culture of psychological violence against those who leave the religion.

Thus, it does not have to be a formal series of threats. It can, in fact, be a general case of violence. As we saw with Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun fleeing from Saudi Arabia into Canada and seeking, and acquiring, asylum, which was an international story of hope and triumph and a symbolic fear for many theocratic governments and fundamentalist families around the world.

Kay was wearing her own hijab at the age of 8 in Tanzania as a Shia Muslim. Once 18-years-old, she attended Monash University Malaysia while simultaneously realizing that this simply was not a garment reflecting of her authentic self. When she took a photo without the scarf and then took a photo, she was abused, as she reported to the Daily Mail Australia. This is not right. Now, hijab is seen as a symbol of oppression and patriarchy to Kay, which is a valid perspective akin to others seeing the hijab as a symbol of a faithful, practicing Muslim woman. Both are culturally valid; fundamentally, it is about women's fundamental right to non-coercively determine their lives, even down to clothing.

Kay views sections or passages within the Quran as endorsing wife beating, the sinfulness of a woman saying no to a husband's advances for sex, the mandatory need for women to wear the hijab, and so on. We have to be honest about these things. Some interpretations take this on board as a first principle and then enact this in family and communal life and then impose these on women; however, it is, also, important, even more so with the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment and prejudicial behaviours, to note the fact that most Muslims simply don't act or think in this way. It would be ignorant and denialist to refuse proper conversation on the former case and bigoted to assume or assert the latter case.

Non-Muslims indicated Islam, insofar as Kay knew it, was incompatible with modern values, which Kay took more to heart, as this was something irreconcilable for her. Hence, she then went on to remove the religion from her life. In the extreme interpretations, apparently, that she took on board or had been taught, Kay began to reject them: punishment of homosexuals, inequality of the genders in a plethora of domains, and the enforcement of the hijab. These were the principles that did not seem to jive with the modern world that Kay had been introduced to, through the university system. The removal of the hijab was not the first step in a journey but, rather, a key to opening a door for those first steps in the tradition of many freethinking women coming before her, of those who found a new set of paths after taking the key and simply opening the door themselves.

In western Sydney, not all preachers are like this, but the ones who are should be highlighted and indicated as non-controversially extremist preachers, the Sunni fundamentalist preacher, Nassim Abdi, has been funded by the Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah Association, where she stated that it was a sin for women to refuse sex with their own husband. By implication to this specific preacher's interpretation of the theology, women do not have agency in one of the most intimate experiences of human beings and, in the case of women, one of the most consequential possible acts for women's lives and livelihoods.

Abdi may simply miss this; he may simply miss the fact that women have rights and, thus, are entitled to equal treatment and choice in who they meet and deal with in life. The problem can be demarcated into the Salafi-Wahhabi school of Islam and other Islamist groups, or those who are vying for some form of political power – as a religious grouping – and, thus, becoming a

theocratic ideological stance with explicit values and, obviously, derived values. One spokesperson for, supposedly, one Islamist group named Hizb ut-Tahrir, Uthman Badar, in Australia made an open statement of violence and murder, in that ex-Muslims should be killed to Badar.

When individuals speak of the fundamentalist Muslims or fundamentalist Islam, these are the groups and ideologies intended to be spoke of, but, instead, these can, unfortunately, and to the detriment of the livelihood of honorable people, lead to the bullying, harassment, and open discrimination against ordinary Muslims, not only in the host country but all over the world. This is the focus of the sociopolitical Left, as Islamism is the focus of the sociopolitical Right; both as problems with different lenses used to understand them and, subsequently, proposed solutions to deal with them.

Kay continues to receive death threats, as an open ex-Muslim, on social media platforms. She regards the leaving of Islam as a terrifying realization for some Muslims, as this may lead to the offending of religious feelings, which, by some metrics, is one facet of the textbook reason for blasphemy laws in the first place. Kay does not like the term Islamophobia. This has been a debated term for some time. But she seems this as a tool, in some regards with good intent but also, leaving others silenced who have left the religion from speaking out, as the criticism is then labelled as racism. In that, if one criticizes the religion, then they are seen as criticism the – pseudoscientific category of – race of the person who adheres to the religion.

Kay described how this isolation, based on the term, can prevent ex-Muslims from being able to express their own thoughts with one another in an honest way, in pubic platform, and in an affirmative, assertive, and constructive way. This can be a basis of activism. I do not see how this could be a limitation in other contexts as well. There should be a normalization of those enforced to live in silence coming out and speaking their truth to those who are using the tactics and political strategies of bullies and thugs to prevent honest and sincere pain and suffering to come to light, to speak.

Ex-Muslims, indeed even via having the title “ex-Muslims,” play by the rulebook of the faith, of Islam, where even after leaving they must somehow represent the views and belief structure opposition. When, in fact, they simply become a-Muslim akin to a-Tolkienists. They simply do not need to be called these things. In terms of the terminology of freedom of expression on international level, or national level, and freedom of speech in some national levels, these default restrictions on some ex-Muslims and then not on Muslims makes this a particularly intransigent problem, as this is completely one-sided. A situation in which women, like Kay, can be threatened with death threats and then they cannot, as a double insult, openly, and frankly, speak out about their oppression there.

This came even in a dramatic recollection of how childhood friends thought that Kay should be killed simply for not adhering to Islam anymore. She found this a shock and a mental strain – no doubt. I feel for her. Luckily, as some reprieve and a form of support, Kay maintains contact and healthy relations with her family, which is comprised of Muslims who accept her in spite of being an atheist. This is ideal.

Kay finds herself working with a variety of ex-Muslim women. I have high hopes for her through Faithless Hijabi. She has much latent talent, which can do a great deal, internationally eventually, for these movements. In her contact with ex-Muslim women, she is finding them reporting on physical and psychological abuse inflicted on them, by their families for rejecting

the mythology of the family. Within the contents of the interpretations, and the letter of the law, for these women in these families, she is noting the very real suffering of these women. It is a new organization developed to help women who are coming from the more extreme cases, who have, likely, experienced physical and psychological violence – two of the big three categories of violence against women, where the other is known as sexual violence – inflicted on them for explicitly well-known reasons: leaving a religion. It becomes a human rights organization; Kay founded a human rights organization with a niche for women who may have gone through the same process but worse experiences as her in leaving Islam.

Kay has asserted that this is prevalent within the Middle East and many theocratic countries in general, but, here, the stories or narratives of these women – and men, in fact, please see the story of Armin Navabi – can be told and often, unfortunately, to dismissive audiences or unsympathetic ears. It is not only the forms of the threats, but it is the content too. For example, I some of the reportage, Kay notes that if a woman is not wearing the hijab and, in fact, is raped or sexually assaulted, then there will be the immediate blame on the woman for the act of violence against her: for being immodest, displeasing Allah. The woman, by the act of being violated as a representative of the family in some contexts, has, in fact, violated the honor of the family, has dishonored the familial name and heritage, by being, often, cruelly, brutally, and grotesquely violated via rape by a male.

These are forms of social control. Secular totalitarian ideologies function in a similar way, where we can see state-based oppression of women. In the case of Nicolae Ceaușescu from Romania, as he led it, with the declaration of and implementation of Decree 770, where this was a referent for the famous – or infamous, depending on the view – *The Handmaid's Tale* of Margaret Atwood, Ceaușescu, as a cold person on the status of women without consideration of women as truly people, the 1966 issue of Decree 770 mandated women have a specified number of children, via the state.

His Decree 770 lead to the regular forms of despair and death that can be expected within the state enacting it, where the orphanages were overloaded, tons of children went unwanted, and thousands of women were injured or died in the process of birthing. A similar denial can be seen with the religious cases, in this instance Islamic, with Kay and women who she deals with or in the case of the preacher mentioned earlier. In these deliberations, Kay found aspects of a branch of the faith anti-gay and anti-women. The ways in which state ideologies impact women's lives is bad enough, but these are acknowledged more and more; the same should be true for religious fundamentalist strains as ideologies as well, because the wellbeing of adherents are on the line. Kay's organization is tackling one aspect. She should be praised and support accordingly.

The Sherif is Back in Town

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 7, 2019

Prominent atheist website, Friendly Atheist, reported on the continued need for assistance of Sherif Gaber, who continues to have troubles with deconversion. Not the fact of leaving the faith, the problem enters into the picture with the authorities chasing after him.

He ran away and could have been placed in jail, literally for exercising a fundamental human right of freedom of, and in this case from, religion and belief.

As reported, “Sherif Gaber is the Egyptian atheist who was first arrested in 2013 for posting about his conversion out of Islam. He ran away before authorities could put him in jail and then continued making YouTube videos from an undisclosed location... There was a blasphemy charge filed against him last March.”

Following this, he, Gaber, stated that he may be arrested once more. Then he followed through with a message – to fans – that he was captured by the law enforcement. Once more, though, several days later, he was free.

His safety is still in question, as individuals still do not know the precise location of Gaber. But there is conversation that he may still be living from hotel to hotel with the legitimate fear of someone wanting to and, in fact, killing him. In July of 2018, he uploaded a video with a statement of opposition to his mere existence knowing where he lived. He was freaking out.

“Then he planned to roam around Europe, perhaps starting in Lebanon and working his way around after that, but even that plan had problems. Because he’s been arrested, he doesn’t have a clean record, which makes it difficult to move around without creating all kinds of red flags,” Hemant Mehta stated, “He kept hitting snags until, finally, he found that the only way he could get out was giving up his Egyptian citizenship and finding a permanent home somewhere else.”

Now, he is asking for financial help if you can lend a hand here.

In the Kingdom of Islam

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 24, 2018

The World and All Its Voices stated that in the nation most associated with Islam, as the birthplace of the faith, retains, as well, its conservative status.

It is the among the most conservative nations on the planet with specific restrictions in place for women or others who may deviate from the teachings of Islam.

One woman, Rana Ahmad, fled Saudi Arabia after a personal declaration of atheism and the experience of the hardships for women in these areas of the world. The difficulties besetting women in family and in government.

Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman set some marginal rights for women including the ability to drive. However, the reforms in the state see women activists imprisoned, threatened with death penalties, and the continuation of the Guardianship system in which women remain peculiarly restricted from it.

“This is the system that forces every woman to seek permission from a husband, brother, father or other close male family member to do simple tasks such as travel, go to school or go to work,” as reported, “Ahmad says such efforts by the Crown Prince are simply ‘propaganda’, and only give the appearance of change.”

Efforts at reform within the borders of the Saudi state should come with a modicum of suspicion. Those situations in which the underlying assumption may be a political distraction from worse human rights violations within Saudi.

Ahmad acquired asylum in Europe and lives in Germany, where physics is her topic of study. She likes physics as a new religion, in a comedic way, because this one offers data within the framework of cause and effect unlike, in her opinion, Islam.

While she was developing in childhood inside of the Kingdom of Saudi of Arabia, “She rode her bike freely, felt the wind in her hair, bickered with her siblings and thought nothing more of the future. That was until the day her grandfather came and took her bike away. She was then told to start covering her hair with a scarf and to act like a woman, not a child,” the reportage explained.

Ahmad was curious as to why she had to cover he body at such a young age of 14. This became the point of change for her. Then she had become a good Muslim girl and have the family accept her. At the age of 19, Ahmad was married.

She fell into a depression given the rigid and unequal gender role imposed within the marriage on her. Ahmad needed more freedom. In due course, she found both atheism and philosophy and, thus, began the seeking of a divorce, especially with the husband being abusive.

The article stated, “Following her divorce, Ahmad says it became even harder for her to do much as she was under the strict surveillance of her family. Eventually they allowed her to start working. On the side, she continued her research into atheism, often with a heavy heart as she began to realise that the religion of her childhood was not for her.”

Atheist Republic is a prominent, probably the most prominent Facebook page, for atheists on a global scale. Within this narrative, Atheist Republic splits into consulates in areas around the world.

Of those inside of the consulates, some will take a picture in some place, even religious purported holy areas, and then have a sign with the state “Atheist Republic” as a sign of both defiance and solidarity.

Atheists from around the world have been traumatized by the actions of the religious in a variety of contexts. This is, in a sense, catharsis for the marginalized, abused, and, of course, the individuals with extant trauma needing resolving.

Through the act of taking a photo at Mecca, and in front of the Ka’bah, Ahmad committed an act of solidarity linked to an action of defiance in the face of the oppression and repression against her, as an individual, and as a woman, as a category, through the laws, policies, and religious injunctions and prescriptions of the Kingdom.

Ahmad planned to flee the country. But she had to plan this surreptitiously, as if leaving on a Shakespearean tryst. It took between 2 and 3 years to devise a plan and find an opening in which to implement it.

By fleeing in this way, she left everything. In the book ‘Ici les femmes ne rêvent pas’ or “Here, women do not dream,” Ahmad talks about the story of leaving the Saudi version of Islam as a woman, as a female inside of an autocratic theocracy.

“When I arrived to Germany I didn’t get any help...I [thought] if you are atheist you will find a lot of organizations but it’s not [really] there. I find if you are Christian, it’s easy to get help,” Ahmad opined, “If you are Muslim, it’s easy to get help. But if you are ex-Muslim or atheist, who cares? Who will say hello or welcome or something like [that] to you? From this moment I promised myself to help other people when they come to Germany.”

Ahmad changed her name to Ahmad upon arrival to Germany. That is to say, Ahmad is in fact a false or faux name in place a real name, probably as a protective measure. This reflects a level of fear of reprisals from some theocratically-minded individuals.

Those who find themselves privileged to inflict or threaten violence, even death, against women and others who leave a faith.

Ahmad concluded, “I only miss my dad. I cry a lot when I remember that I had to leave my dad because I want to live my life. I miss my mom but she [doesn’t] want to talk to me because I am atheist, because I left Islam...I can’t do anything now but I can enjoy my freedom.”

Armin Navabi (Ex-Muslim) Meets and Greets Muslims on Critiques of Islam

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 16, 2018

There was an intriguing moment, recently. The famous former Muslim and founder of Atheist Republic, Armin Navabi, went out to speak with Muslims about the criticism of their faith.

Navabi went into the streets of Lakemba in Sydney, Australia. In conversations with the local believers, there was a consistent narrative set within them. Bearing in mind, Navabi lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada now.

He lives with the constant or, at least, steady stream of death threats, because of public and outspoken atheism and criticism of religion in general, and Islam in particular. Lakemba can be considered, by some, the “unofficial Muslim capital” of Australia.

Aussie Muslims will likely be from Lakemba, in other words. When Navabi went out to meet and greet Muslims, he simply went to discuss the possibility of critiquing Islam and then to garner the responses from ordinary Muslims; those everyday believers hanging out in Lakemba in this case.

One particular interlocutor stated that the choices for non-believers was either Islam or death, which marks the more extreme interpretations of no-critique views. Others thought there should more respect connected to the open dialogue about Islam.

Some, in between, argued that the police should attack individuals who mock the religion. Further, another man stated that Islam is meant to be spread around the world, especially through imposition of Sharia law.

Others considered critique of religion okay, as other religions are criticized within a democratic society; thus, this matches the free society imagery. As per much of the public, and against the stereotypes some may have, the views of Muslims like many groups are mixed and diverse with some individuals motivated to speak in violent terms, i.e., incitement of violence or calls for law enforcement violence against critics of a religion, or mockers of it.

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Resource: Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 7, 2018

One of the important resources, and among the first, is the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (CEMB). It was, as far as I know, mainly founded by the intelligent, ethical, and influential activism ex-Muslim woman, Maryam Namazie. The CEMB started on June 22, 2007 is based out of London in the United Kingdom.

Other founders include Imad Iddine Habib, Nahla Mahmoud, Rayhana Sultan. The UK seems to be one of the hubs of activity for the Ex-Muslim community, as a public fora set and for activism around the world, as well as the United States of America with other organizations

The CEMB does have a manifesto. It works to demarcate ordinary Muslims as allies by implication of not wanting – the CEMB – to be represented by the Islamic organizations and some Muslim community leaders with regressive aspects.

The basic premise is equality of the ex-Muslims with Muslims, for secularism or separation of Mosque and state, and “reason.” They also argue for freedom of expression, especially as this applies to the critique of religion and its ideas.

One common conflation is the critique of religious ideas as attacks on individual people. It is a difficult issue to separate because, at times, there is genuine confusion and other times deliberate obfuscation for the explicit purpose of muddying the waters to prevent criticism of Islam by individuals who believe they have divine mandate to trample on the rights of others and even on others.

The CEMB makes an argument akin to the child abuse argument from Dr. Richard Dawkins with the protection of children from parents who wish to thrust, and often do, their own beliefs about the world onto them. It is an important point.

No one argues for a communist or Republican child; however, we accept implicitly the argument for a Muslim and a Christian child. The former is more benign as this is something with only voting power at the age of adulthood or consent; while, the latter, it is something that takes the entire life of a youth and an adult well prior to the age of consent or adulthood – larger domain of life and longer period of time.

The CEMB, along with a number of other organizations around the world, have been at the forefront for activism for human rights in order to attack the theocratic idea of the apostasy, and blasphemy, and the variety of punishments – censorship, imprisonment, torture, death penalty threat, death, and so on – for what many, especially in the CEMB and other associated organizations, see as imaginary crimes.

These prescriptions for the punishments of the non-believers, unbelievers, and others, come explicitly from injunctions issued by the fundamentalist religious groups and believers of the world through their own attribution to selective literalist pickings of their holy texts.

Namazie, as is deserved, worked hard and earned the Secularist of the Year award from 2005 (a lot of this information is available on a decent Wikipedia page for the CEMB). She, and others, have been facing death threats for a long, long time, continue to get them, and assiduously work against the onslaught of fundamentalist and literalist violence in spite of the real potential for

political and religious violence against a freedom of expression believing, articulate, ethically consistent – very important, and intelligent ex-Muslim, especially so for a woman.

Many ex-Muslims, insofar as I have interviewed them, have been subject to a variety of threats against their livelihoods because of the simple nature of one or two things, or both. They do not believe in Islam. Or they do not believe in Islam and openly state it. They express freedom of religion and freedom of expression, as stated in a variety of international rights documents spinning the rights ball back to December 10, 1948, or 70 years ago with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the United Nations.

However, these countries appear to claim divine status over rights status. It is, in this sense, where I see the battleground for the first quarter of the 21st century with the fight for either transcendental traditional religious moral law claims and international secular human rights claims for the basis of ethics. The former only permits itself. The latter provides a space for the religious and the non-religious.

I state this because the freedom of religion to believe in Islam and the freedom of expression to the concerns of the Muslim community, or individual Muslims of all stripes and sects, and to the perceived veracity of the Islamic claims remain valid. However, these individuals who want to kill those who do not believe add additional sub-clauses, implicit, to these rights that simply do not exist.

You have, to them – by what many of them have said and, indeed, have done, the right to freedom of religion, except if you stop believing in Islam, and the freedom of expression, except if you speak out against the tenets of Islam or Muslims.

This violates a fundamental principle, a superordinate ethical precept inherent in the Golden Rule and implied through the human rights instantiated throughout much of the world, which is universality of human rights. The freedom of religion implies a universality extending to freedom from religion and for freedom of expression to mean freedom to express against the dictates and beliefs of Islam.

The CEMB and the brave Namazie remain a part of the international group of increasingly prominent people – earned through hard work and sacrifice – who represent the superordinate ethical interpretation, the proper one or accurate declaration, of human rights, in this universalistic sense – for everyone and not some or none.

The raising of awareness for the concerns and issues of the ex-Muslims of the world is an important piece of the work for greater equality and a more just society and world. If we look at the activists of the world, we can see the concerns of them differing from one another.

However, there are, certainly, a variety of common and consistent concerns for the ex-Muslim population. Also, there remain consistent, long-term activist concerns overlapping with the derivatives or the outcroppings of fundamentalist religion with not only apostasy or blasphemy as purported irreligious crimes.

The issues for the LGBTQ2IA+ community, as some Canadians label it, is manifest and manifold, so plentiful, and the homophobia comes from a large swathe of the fundamentalist religious communities against the more ordinary believers who accept these communities of the sexual orientation and gender identity community.

It is the same for the community of many women. Not all, but a sufficient number of, women undergo restriction within fundamentalist and literalist, and at time moderate or ordinary, Muslim communities and households; where the concern of the CEMB becomes the concern of many of these women, these are human rights or women's rights issues to be dealt with organizationally centralized from the United Kingdom but distributed activities around the world with other councils and organizations working in unison for the fundamental rights of persons of women and their freedoms too.

One of the intriguing aspects of the work of the CEMB, and Namazie and Fariborz Pooya, is Bread & Roses TV. It is tied to the work of the CEMB. Other media work has been successful, to a degree, with the #ExMuslimBecause social media campaign. Many came out as apostates.

This is all, as far as I can tell, part of the larger activist network work to make apostasy and freedom of expression around taboo topics more common, to make them not as verboten – especially those topics deemed streng verboten. The topics of apostasy, blasphemy, LGBTQ2IA+ concerns, women's issues, und so weiter.

The hashtag came with a decent count, by the way, at over 100,000 uses within two weeks. The basic premise extends the general notions or sentiments of a fight for human rights and against imposition against those rights being implemented for actualized for everybody – back to universality once more.

Some common responses or claims are that the critiques of the ideas of Islam become Islamophobic rather than restricting the term “Islamophobia” or “Islamophobic” to those with anti-Muslim bigotry, which are not the same thing. One may respect the person and disagree with the ideas.

One who loves their Muslim family members but disagrees with the beliefs and suggested practices in various sects of Islam is anti-Islam and pro-Muslim family members. However, and unfortunately, this conflation of meanings between critiques of ideas and ad hominem attacks on people reflects a confusion via conflation found in the Liberal community more than others.

It comes from a positive notion of wanting to protect the little person, the less powerful, the lost, the in pain, the tortured and imprisoned, those threatened with death and who cannot practice or leave their faith, and so on; but this then extrapolates to an attack on the ideas of some of these individuals, it can lead to protections of murderers, i.e., the Charlie Hebdo cartoonist killers.

The comparison in the thought pattern, but not the magnitude of outcome, is in the incessant conservative protections via obfuscation and even outright lies about the war crimes of American presidents against the Muslim populations of the world, especially as seen in the almost two-decade-long wars seen in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The CEMB has been active with the campaigns against homophobia through Pride marches and so on in London and – I assume – elsewhere. Finally, there have been a sanctuary – not only in the other ways but also – through the argute decision for an annual gathering through a conference.

It helps to bring those the self-confidence and self-esteem against, often, the idea of a punitive, comminatory, and criticaster Theity who intervenes, judges, and is harsh with them as ex-Muslims for questioning the basic belief structure of Islam.

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Resource: Atheist Refugee Relief

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 5, 2018

Refugees remain a growing and at risk population in the world. Their plight is in a sense all of ours. You cannot escape it. It is something that is part and parcel of the modern world with a warming climate and exacerbated military interventions and conflicts.

The problems for losing a homeland is also losing a house as a home as well. What is it to lose a home? It is potentially losing loved ones while being jettisoned for any variety of reasons.

It is the loss, quite possibly, of valued memorabilia and tokens and memories of one's life. Then there are the drastic declines in quality of life for the people who are forced to leave and even flee.

These are refugees. They are subject to the realities and horrors of war, human desperation in scarcity conditions, pain and misery in varieties of deprivations unknown to much of the advanced industrial economies, and left with nothing but their bodies, a few items, and, perhaps, some close familial or social connections.

Some efforts to help these populations in regard to religion but not irreligion. It amounts to another manifestation of open disregard and compassion for those without formal faiths, or who have left one or another religion.

The refugee population, as it grows, and as many encounter the sincere problem in theology in real life without any necessary theological training of the Problem of Evil, real evil, more and more may be questioning the goodness of their Deity or, if involved in prayer and intervention, Theity.

Not an issue to be taken lightly in any way. But, the basic premise for the ex-Muslim and atheist populations is the degree to which they can garner some help too; there is an organization called Atheist Refugee Relief that is constructed so as to help the refugee population without a formal religion and a disbelief in the divine.

You can find out more about the atheist population of refugees and ways in which they can get more help through the link in the reference. Nonetheless, these are people in often desperate and horrid circumstances trying to find some semblance of stability and sustainable living but continue to be uprooted, extirpated, from their places that they set up.

One of the ways to help, if you feel so inclined, to look into the work of organizations such as Atheist Refugee Relief and work to either support them, or similar organizations, directly or indirectly with more exposure.

Reference

Atheist Refugee Relief. (2018). Atheist Refugee Relief. Retrieved from <https://atheist-refugees.com/en/>.

Yasmine Mohammed at Harvard University

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 4, 2018

Our lovely founder, Yasmine Mohammed, had the opportunity to speak with the Harvard University community at Harvard University about her views and work.

Mohammed spoke alongside prominent voices including Faisal Al Mutar and Yeonmi Park. In this short clip at Harvard University, the idea is to represent the ways in which to wear some Muslim garbs intended for women.

Then the next question to the community, by Mohammed, is if this particular garment is, in fact, empowering as some may claim or more restricting. It becomes a qualitative and empirical question as to whether this is a sign of empowerment or not.

Mohammed suggests not, at least for most. Bearing in mind, Mohammed comes from a context in which the wearing of the garment was not an option. It was mandatory. She did not have a choice in the matter.

It is in this sense that the empowerment may, in fact, be illusory in the context of a mandatory rule to wear something, especially covering several sense organs. It is akin to telling women what they can and cannot wear in their private lives.

This is a question of women's bodily autonomy and choice about clothing. The same could be said for nuns for centuries in Canadian society. Why should they be forced to wear it? Is it a choice or a coerced decision – so not a real choice?

These are important critical thinking experiments brought forward by Mohammed, and astutely posed and presented - effortlessly.

Reference

The AHA Foundation. (2018, June 6). Yasmine Mohammed at Harvard University: "Try on this niqab and see if you feel empowered.". Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=9PbR5Si4sfA.

Resource: Atheist Republic

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 4, 2018

One of the most prominent atheist organizations in the electronic world is Atheist Republic started by Armin Navabi. A very nice, and intelligent and ethical, man who hails from Iran and lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, now.

British Columbia is the least religious province in the entire country. Navabi has an interesting story. I recommend doing some search engines research on him. The purpose of Atheist Republic, as a non-profit organization under the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, is to provide a space for the non-religious within the convinced atheist grouping.

Many of these individuals come from religious homes, probably. Navabi is an ex-Muslims. The organization works in tandem, whether organizationally or with some prominent individuals, with ex-Muslims. It is important to provide this space for the atheist populations of the world, as they comprise a hunk of the ex-Muslim population.

Of course, many ex-Muslims become a different sect, tradition, or denomination of Islam, or another religion, or simply spiritual or agnostic. But the provisions for the atheist ex-Muslim population is important and the ability to organize socially or for activism through online resources is important.

Whether online alone or the online world to facilitate the offline activities, Atheist Republic is a large and rapidly growing organization worth keeping an eye on, especially if you are an atheist ex-Muslim in need of community.

Everyone has, at times, felt alone, as if no one can hear their voice. However, there are not-quite panaceas but resources such as Atheist Republic to help solve some of the problems associated with the isolation of the ex-Muslim population in even their own countries and communities.

The confident believer or unbeliever should be able to live freely, openly, and without unfair or unjust treatment compared to others with the equal right to live a life of dignity, autonomy, and respect. Unfortunately, these international rights and privileges are, frequently, violated – often more for women than for men, which may explain the demographic differences between the men and the women in the ex-Muslim communities, at least the open ones.

The power of rational people coming together is important for the integration of the ex-Muslim community, of which Atheist Republic can be one of many groupings for the furtherance of equality and peace efforts around the world.

Reference

Atheist Republic. (2018). Atheist Republic. Retrieved from <http://www.atheistrepublic.com/>.

Egyptian Pastor Speaks Out

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 27, 2018

Ex-Muslims comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. One of them is the individuals who did not stop believing in a faith, or a god, and transitioned into another faith from Islam. Or a more moderated, ordinary version of the faith compared to, for example, the Islamists who want political power.

Some even become religious leaders in another faith. One example was recently reported on with the Reverend Majed El Shafie. He was being tortured and imprisoned in Egypt. He was leading a successful underground church movement. Christians who were Muslims. It happens, more than one might assume.

Shafie was held in the Abu Zabal Prison for one week in 1998 because of leading a group of 24,000 Christians in a religious movement. It was stated that he would be free and have his vehicle returned to him, as well as a house and a beautiful woman if he renounced his fellows in the Christian faith. An interesting offer, seems.

Granted, this publication is the Christian Post, so pardon the slant of the reportage here – skeptical antennae up!

The only name sold out by Shafie, apparently, was his Lord and Saviour: Jesus Christ. To most reading these references to higher powers and prophets do not hold much weight.

After saying these things, Shafie was beaten over three days with further torture and imprisonment. Then he was sent to the police hospital to recover for three months. On three charges, he was sentenced to death.

The intimidation tactic, as is usual by states, was to shut him up. Shafie escaped to Israel and was given asylum in Canadian society. He wanted to create a human rights non-profit to help the innumerable number of persecuted religious believers of faiths all over the world.

He did. Now, it has been operational for about 15 years or more. The organization is One Free World International, and remains based on the real suffering of a persecuted religious person and, in particular and relevant to the community here, an ex-Muslim. Another flavour or variety of ex-Muslim in the growing community of non-believers.

Rev. Shafie stated, “I was taken to the prison for seven days’ torture... They started by shaving my hair off my head, putting my head in buckets of cold and hot water, hanging me upside down. On the third day, they released dogs to attack me but the dogs didn’t attack. After that, they crucified me for two days and a half.”

He described how they caused a cut on the back of his left shoulder, to the bone, and then rubbed salt in the open wound, where he almost died and needed hospital treatment for those three months as a result.

The torturers did not want Shafie dead right away; they wanted the reverend, and ex-Muslim, to suffer first, and quite a lot by the sound and tone of it. They then work to destroy the reputation of the individual before killing them to keep them from becoming a martyr for the general public.

If you are a religious ex-Muslim, you may want to look into the organization founded by Shafie through a Google or other search engines. There are all kinds of help available in the world. It is only a matter of finding it.

Reference

Smith, S. (2018, August 1). Egyptian Pastor Details How He Was Tortured for Christ, Used Jet Ski to Escape. Retrieved from <https://www.christianpost.com/news/egyptian-pastor-details-how-he-was-tortured-for-christ-used-jet-s...>

Resources: Ex-Muslims of North America

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 9, 2018

Ex-Muslims of North America (EXMNA) is a 501(c)(3) registered non-profit organization. Its emphases of operation are the reduction of discrimination against ex-Muslims and for the promotion of secular values tied to religious dissent.

People have the right to disbelieve a religion. They have the right to freedom of expression against the tenets of a religion. That provides the basis for the EXMNA as an entity. Sarah Haidar, one of the current staff, and Muhammed Syed, current president, founded the organization in 2013 in Washington, D.C.

Nas Ishmael and Sadar Ali founded the other portion in Toronto. The forms of isolation and bigotry faced by many who leave Islam find themselves in the expression of death threat and dead bodies at times.

EXMNA and similar organizations provide a basis for solidarity and support, and activism. Through the support networks, the ex-Muslims in North America can branch together with the international community of unbelievers for real activism against the fundamentalist theocratic violence and bigotry against those individuals who simply want to stop believing in peace, as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights statements in Article 18:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

I do not see the right to kill unbelievers in the statement there. According to its Wikipedia page, sorry for the reference there, there are 25 cities in North America with chapters of the organization and over 1,000 volunteers in those 25 cities in total, boasting about 24,000 members in the group.

There are some staff and volunteers for EXMNA, which functions largely on donations. The meetings of the group remain closed-group because of the safety concerns for those involved in them, as well as there being a screening process for those individuals involved in it. It provides authentication of the persons attending the events.

As props up in the news, many corpses can be found due to the violent backlashes against those who simply stopped believing. EXMNA published The Ex-Muslim. It is claimed to be the first, and only mind you, magazine for the former Muslim population. Not a small feat, or feature.

Reference

Ex-Muslims of North America. (2018). Ex-Muslims of North America. Retrieved from <https://www.exmna.org/#>.

United Nations. (1948, December 10). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

Fighting for Freedom, Fighting for Place: Australian Ex-Muslim Network

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 7, 2018

Identity: people die for it; they kill others for it. As Douglas Rushkoff has noted in the past, if not to have others believe in it – obviously not the dead ones, then to keep believing in it ourselves.

Australian society works within a number of systems. Some operate underground, off the grid, but not quite underwater. This comes in the form of the ex-Muslim community, for the protection of the ex-Muslims in unsafe conditions at the moment.

The circumstances for the world's hundreds of millions of Muslims remains plural and will continue to be plural throughout the 21st century. Insofar as I can discern with international right documents, the fundamental human rights to belief, conscience, and religion permit individuals to adhere to a faith.

In its corollary, persons deserve and reserve the fundamental human right to leave a religion without qualms or queries. The nature of human rights becomes reciprocal in this regard, utilitarian or a Golden Rule ethic.

The rock upon which freedom can be built stands in the light of the choices in front of us: to do one thing or another, and then to choose one over the other. (If only one option, not much of a choice.) Unfortunately, a minority of the Muslim population in the world – alongside other faiths, though less prominently in this regard – who begin to disbelieve confront familial, social, and theocratic-legal pressures to cease and desist the questions about the religion.

In some news items, we can discover the stories of those murdered based on disbelief; in other case studies, we can see the escape from the family members hunting them. Ex-Muslims in the latter category comprise the network managers and entrants around the world in the increasing numbers of the non-religious who come from an Islamic religious heritage.

Now, they stopped believing and fled the nation. Others work to help individuals who want to believe or not, based on personal reasons. These can be ordinary Muslims with an activist bent. In some reportage, in June mind you, ABC reported on the ex-Muslim network in Australia.

One woman named Aisha spoke of not wearing a hijab, having friends placing a photo on social media of this, and then the parents finding out. The parents called Aisha a whore; that she would “end up in the gutters,” in her words.

Her parents became physically violent. The police became involved in the conflict. Her parents asserted Aisha was a compulsive liar. Now, her identity is protected based on a fear of the potential repercussions from the family. Many members of the underground network speak on the disownment of family. The being forced into a life of silence.

The reality of being demonized and stigmatized, and traumatized, in the public sphere, by the clerics and community leaders. These ex-Muslims or former believers in a religion begin to live dual lives in order to appease the insanity of the community retribution against non-believers.

This becomes an issue to health and wellbeing of the person involved with the abuse coming in numerous forms while also remaining financially dependent on some people. For example, the abuse may come from one's job or parents.

This forces ex-Muslims into false identities in public while keeping their lack of faith hidden from the public eye. Obviously, they want to live a free life as they are, as everyone reserves a right; however, their lives become topsy-turvy, and black-and-white – at the same time.

For other communities with a longer tradition of open doubt or outspokenness, this becomes an issue. Because the Australian Bureau of Statistics on the number of Muslims in the nation will remain artificially inflated with ex-Muslims simply stating, "Islam," as their faith on the census forms to appease the family in some form – even with the family none the wiser.

Members of the Australian ex-Muslim network described the fear and terror of coming out. This seems akin to gay men coming out in the middle of the 20th century in the United States of America.

Another profiled woman, Nadia, ran a blog called Nullifidian. There, she wrote about the personal experiences of homeschooling in a conservative, strict Islamic home. Now, she is ostracized from family and living in her 20s.

She covers hair and remains disguised in various representations, e.g. online. Nadia explained the fear of "disownment, isolation, imprisonment or death." She remarked in some writing on the chosen anonymity online with the abuse and threats, even while living in a secular Western nation.

As with those who leave Judaism and feel a nostalgia for the traditions, many ex-Muslims may feel a sense of wanting the ritual and structure of the belief system and practices back into their lives; it may also reflect the loss of structure and support, where the yearning for these things reflects an unhealthy nostalgia, too.

This Australian network does not limit to the nation. The network links with other collectives of ex-Muslims, secretive and public, from around the world. One such organization is Faith to Faithless founded by Imtiaz Shams. Others include the various ex-Muslim councils from around the world.

Shams stated, "If you talk about ex-Muslims, you have to talk about the internet... When I left Islam, I thought I was the only one in the world... I spent my time building ex-Muslim communities that are like Fight Club style, you know, you have to know someone to get in across the world with my friends... We were just kids on the internet, we were not activists."

Then he moved to the online world of Reddit, where the ex-Muslim community has begun to thrive more than others. Same with social media platforms including Facebook and WhatsApp. Ex-Muslims enter into a world of abuse at times: lies, abuse, violence, death threats, and slurs thrown at them with venomous tongues intended to cause harm.

Another narrative from Fatima described the dual-life, where she lived as a Muslim in public but as a non-Muslim in private. She wants to live life without the religion, but she cannot do so with the pressures from within the community.

Other prominent people, with their real names known, have been killed, as in the American-Bangladeshi case of Avijit Roy. He was hacked to death at a book fair in Bangladesh. Roy

created an online community for freethinkers, humanist, and atheists from South Asia or who are South Asian.

Other prominent groups include Ex-Muslims of North America (EXMNA) and the Council of Ex-Muslims in Britain (CEMB). It is important to note one of the statistics reported in the article. That, in the United States of America, 23% of those who were raised as Muslims no longer identify as Muslim. About ¼ of those raised in the faith in America leave it.

The number of unbelievers or nonbelievers in other countries including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, are likely in significant or non-trivial numbers; however, they fear coming out.

Reference

Khalik, J. (2018, June 10). Secret ex-Muslim network in Australia fear disownment and abuse. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-09/double-lives:-the-secret-ex-muslim-network-in-australia/9811340>.

Imtiaz Shams and Faith to Faithless

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 7, 2018

The nature of activism is not in the show of empty solidarity, though in a fairer analysis this does help.

The core of activism amounts to the willingness to help another human being in desperate circumstances at potential great cost to oneself. At a minimum, there must or likely will be a cost for the individual involved in the activism.

Organizations exist for the assistance in the activism of the non-religious and the former fundamentalist religious. Some organizations devote themselves to the community of so-called 'apostates' or the ex-Muslims. Those who live with death threats over their heads and own family hunting them down for retribution for dishonoring the family.

One broad-based group is called Faith to Faithless run by Imtiaz Shams. A young man with a mission to not only assist the ex-Muslim population but the broad base of those people who have lived through difficult circumstances of a fundamentalist religious upbringing and need to escape.

Imtiaz was a Muslim, but then stopped believing in the faith. He, genuinely - as many do, felt alone as the world's only ex-Muslim. This amounts to the psychological torture inflicted, systematically on the religious who become non-religious. A social mechanism to feel as if alone and so to then need to dive back into the open arms - with requirements - of the religious community.

The purpose of the organization is two-fold, to connect and support. Those who feel alone, get them together online or in some other fashion. Those without a support but not alone, give them some form of support.

It is reported, "He said in the last year the organisation has helped 1000 people from a variety of backgrounds including Ultra-Orthodox Hasidic ex-Jews, Jehovah's Witness, ex-Muslims, ex-evangelical Christians, Exclusive Brethren, as well as people leaving cults."

A diverse base of those who underwent some form of abuse in a fundamentalist community and wanted out of it. Faith to Faithless helped to them. Shams spoke at the Humanist International Conference in Auckland, New Zealand in early August.

He focused on the subject matter of the human right rights of all people. By implication, this means the rights of those who want to believe in a religion; also, those who want to leave a faith because of personal preference.

The reportage makes the case that the argument sounds as if someone who was part of the LGBTQ+ community in the past. It makes sense. People in the closet of keeping a deep secret of personal identity to themselves for fear of legal or physical reprisal, or social stigma. Everyone wants to belong.

The idea of not only being rejected by one's job - which one can acquire in another place or profession - but also social and family life. That is painful and a tremendous dilemma for those

undergoing these dramatic life circumstances of tension between leaving or staying, coming out or living a literal lie. Fun, huh?

Shams explained, “If you are young, and you don’t know how to get help you are stuffed. You become homeless, people try to kill themselves... When someone leaves a very high-control group, let’s say Jehovah’s Witnesses or Gloriavale for instance, they don’t even know how to access traditional standard services. They don’t know how to go to the police, they don’t know how to get social services, none of that.”

Many of the apostates found that the support services treated them poorly. The bad treatment from the social services can be dismissal of their claims, to bad referrals, to bad provision of mental health services, and so on.

This is not only with friends, family, and professional life. It can come from the educational domain, such as on the university campuses as well; that has been an area of focus for Shams in the past. He is a frequent speaker on television programs. (Please do use a search engine to see him - well-recommended.)

More information in the article in the reference.

Reference

Hancock, F. (2018, August 7). Faith to Faithless: The group that supports people who no longer believe. Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/life/106066133/faith-to-faithless-the-group-that-supports-people-....>

Fundraising for Ex-Muslims

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 6, 2018

The means by which to express solidarity with the less fortunate costs nothing, as Deeyah Khan - the veteran filmmaker - notes. The ability to state support costs only some air and a tad of time, but, for those in the most oppressive theocratic regimes and regressive sociopolitical contexts - especially for girls and women, this can mean the world to them. It means someone cares: anyone.

It can mean the difference of someone caring and showing support or not to a poor African-American child in the inner city ghetto. Kids from rich and unloving families do worse than children from poor and loving families, on average and over the long-term.

Take the sentiment of his research into the arena of activism, the same can, in a general humanistic set of ethics, be considered, more or less, the same. One means of solidarity is support through finances of those in need of it.

One GoFundMe campaign is comprised of these sisters from Saudi Arabia: Manal, Muna, and Nauf. As reported in the campaign for them, they live in constant fear. The reason: terror or discovery of their ex-Muslim status. They not only reject God but also Islam in particular and so Allah, and so the patriarchs who enforce His laws.

They earned the chance to escape the country to have their lives back and walk without having to wear their enforced veil. In most circumstances, the issue for human rights campaigners is not the veil in and of itself, mostly, but the forced wearing of a piece of clothing with fear of legal and physical reprisal for non-adherence.

As also stated, "They couldn't obtain any protection or refugee status because they currently are in a middle-eastern country. They are in danger. Their brothers are searching for them and if they are found they are very likely to be murdered."

Their own family members are looking for them. Because they are ex-Muslim. They need some help, as others do too. If you can support them with some finances, this can embolden others with their examples.

The thing with the theocratic regimes seen today in the Islamic world, or in Christendom in history, or in the theonomy of the Atwood world of Gilead: they're fragile. Not many need to doubt and act out to have them begin to crumble, not in decades but months or years.

The GoFundMe is an effort along those lines of those who act out and openly express their doubt, even without words through not wearing a veil. The regimes are legitimately terrifying for those inside of them, in a way some are terrified of throwing a rock at a window or a wall living inside a giant glass house.

The finances donated to the campaign could help them get out, as they lack the funding to do so. Their location - as well as their real names, apparently - are not public, but the money will help them escape to a Western, modernized country - where they will request asylum.

Reference

GoFundMe. (2018). Operation Rescue Sisters Saudi. Retrieved from <https://www.gofundme.com/operation-rescue-sisters-saudi>.

Haidar, Syed, and Shams, and Support for Ex-Muslims

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 1, 2018

Through BBC News, there was some good, but older, reportage on the nature of ex-Muslims building community for having a voice and protection for themselves.

It was stated that many Muslims who leave the faith then face a protracted period of abuse and violence. This creates a situation in which individuals must deal with the difficulties of the family and the community not only rejecting them but also doing so aggressively.

One man, Muhammad Syed, left Islam years ago, which means becoming an ex-Muslim. It seems like an interesting commentary to me. That is, the ones who leave the religion and form councils around the world with national representatives play by the rule book of the definitions and terms of the religious.

People who leave Christianity, except maybe Jehovah's Witnesses - who become ex-JWs, rarely become ex-Christians in North America and Western Europe. Rather, they amount to the individuals who are atheists or non-religious in general.

They do not, and not as a smart and conscious tactic, leave the religion and then become a title related to the conceptual framework of viewing the world with the religion. But rather, they are then something entirely other or mostly different than the original title of Christian.

When Syed left, he opines on something intriguing: the lack of doubt within the immediate community because everyone believes in the ideas and morality of the religion. In 2007, Syed then realized that he did not believe in Islam at all.

As a young lad, he had an interest in the sciences, especially astronomy and the space sciences including an interest in the television portrayals of science fiction in Star Trek and Star Wars. He identifies as a liberal. His parents had PhDs.

In his early 20s only a few months prior to the tragedy of 9/11, he went back to the United States. America entered war-time. His Pakistani friends became very conservative in orientation.

Syed stated, "There was one guy in particular... I knew him through high school... We were in the same college. We were similar people - he was liberal like me. Then he grew this foot-and-a-half long beard.... He was talking about torture in the grave (an Islamic belief in punishment after death)... And he was talking about it being a real thing that people have witnessed - a very superstitious type of thinking."

With his own scientific interest and background, Syed found this bizarre. He began to study the religious texts, including the Quran and the hadiths, and the secondary texts of Islam. He considered Islam humanistic and scientific.

He was intent on showing his friend wrong. He then realized, starkly, the friend had the correct view. He had the wrong view, on Islam. Skip to another scene, Syed is having dinner with some friends. One survived leukaemia earlier in life.

The man was praising God for the recovery from the highly lethal disease. However, within the mind of Syed, he was considering the probability of surviving from leukaemia. Then he thought, “How do you know that God is the one that saved you - versus you being in the percentage that is saved generally?”

Then Syed had an epiphany about the absurdity of some of the claims of the friend. It becomes a matter of the odds, a coin toss, or a throw of the die and hoping not to – so to speak.

“From there I thought: ‘I understand this is all false, and I’ve understood it for a while, I just haven’t self-acknowledged it.’... It’s not that you want to, or don’t want to, believe it anymore... It’s like you understand Newton’s equations for gravity - if you understand them, you understand them. You can’t not understand them afterwards,” Syed explained.

His family is a liberal family with the mother being quite open-minded. Within a few weeks, he decided to tell the family that he was an ex-Muslim. The family was noticeably shocked or surprised by the announcement of their son to them.

In fact, he elaborates that the shock was, indeed, connected to surprise about the coming out. It sounds as if Syed was a gay man in the 1940s coming out in America. For some Muslims, 13 nations around the world, the death penalty is applied to them.

When you read or hear of the different punishments of a severe form such as lashings, whippings, and death – even purported “gnashings of teeth” in the afterlife, there may be associated cascade effects inside of the societies in which these punishments emerge out of the underbelly of Islamic theocratic law.

The family and the community punishments can precede or co-occur with these punishments and legal threats for those who leave the religion. Syed noted wanting the best for those one loves in their life.

“If you believe that by going down a certain path a relative will - say - burn for eternity, it’s hard not to push back... A lot of that pushback comes from a place of love. It’s not from a place of hate,” Syed opined.

He then spoke to friends about the change in the personal worldview. Then he began to know other ex-Muslims. One of them was Sarah Haidar. She was born in Pakistan and then raised in Texas. Haidar left Islam to become an ex-Muslim at the age of 15 or 16.

She never met another ex-Muslim. Part of this is demographic, living in Texas – joke aside, the loneliness for ex-Muslims remains palpable.

Haidar remarked, “When I found out Muhammad was an atheist, I didn’t believe him... I thought maybe it was a joke. When I realised it was the case, it really was astounding to me.”

Haidar was raised by parents who were conservative compared to the parents typically found in the West. Her parents were liberal relative to the standard Muslim parents. One may assume compared to those in Pakistan, as an example. Many North Americans consider Texas conservative central, by North American standards.

“They never abused me... But they were never happy with my choices. I got pushback every step of the way... It was a long process for them to understand this was an intellectual choice, and to have some mild respect for it. But they did get there, and many ex-Muslims’ parents would not have...” Haidar continued, “I know ex-Muslims who have no contact with their

family at all - either for fear of physical abuse or retribution, or because the family have shunned them.”

Syed and Haidar went on the hunt, the prowl, for other ex-Muslims. In the underbrush of the online world and through the word of mouth, they began to garner a small and informal, but also growing, network of those who have renounced Islam.

Risks can ensue for those individuals. Their – Syed’s and Haidar’s – lives become augury’s for the lives of others. People can palter and speak in the can’t necessary to get information about those trying to save the lives of others.

They have to be mulish and discerning in this, as a result. Some false calls may act surly; however, the goal is to help others and not simply leave them vulnerable to attack. It is a network after all. A slip of the tongue can mean an identity revealed and a life taken away prematurely.

The threats are real. Theo van Gogh remains one prominent example but a European, so people notice this. There are others of equal worth and value in the world, who will never have a name known or a face seen by the wider public with the ability to enforce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Think about that. It is not a tree in a forest this time.

The reportage continued, “‘Sarah thought she was the only one,’ says Muhammad. ‘We thought there were probably others like that.’ Through word-of-mouth, and online forums, they built a small, informal network of ex-Muslims. Then came the next step: meeting in real life.”

Syed worked to speak with people o the phone and took necessary precautions for safety because of the potential for violent Muslims finding them out. Haidar remembers this as a scary period in time. That is, the tension and the excitement was nerve-racking for her.

The risk in simply coming out to a public place was an issue. They began to meet others and spread the word. There were meetings in bars, pubs, cafes, restaurants, and so on. Starting in the Autumn of 2013, Syed and Haidar decided to create the Ex-Muslims of North America.

It was an organization devoted, in the public eye, to support and provide coverage for the ex-Muslims – ahem – in North America. There was a large demand for their support system and networks.

Syed stated, “You have to assess the risk. You have to figure out whether this was worth it. But there was no other way. Somebody had to take that chance. Somebody had to make that happen... I didn’t honestly see another way... There were no other people that were doing this, even around the world. We were in the right place, the right time, and I had the right mentality.”

He remarked that his upbringing inculcated the desire to help those in need.

The report stated, “Four years on, Muhammad and Sarah’s network - which is run by volunteers and relies on donations - has around 1,000 ex-Muslims in 25 cities in North America. People often call in the middle of night. Sometimes they’re suicidal.”

These are people in desperate circumstances with many, likely, losing not only their family and friends but also their will to live without them. Few people are capable of the isolation necessary to live in solitary confinement or something closely resembling it – outside of a jail cell: open-air isolation.

One individual after stating to the family that he intended to leave Islam had a gun placed to his head. One person was forced to take part in an exorcism. This makes for fallow psychological ground for feelings of betrayal, resentment, and then self-imposed isolation and potential suicidal ideation.

“If they want to talk, we usually connect them with somebody - similar age group, somebody that can understand them...Often it’s ethnic - so, for example, Saudi people can understand Saudis better. We have people from 40 different ethnic backgrounds,” Syed stated, “We had a young girl, her parents weren’t letting her study... Home schooled at high school, expected she would get married, she can’t go to college, she wanted out. She wanted to live her life. We were able to connect her to someone else, someone who had a spare couch. It’s not much - but for somebody who has nothing, it’s huge.”

The organization can get both threats as well as cries for help. Many of them come through social media or emails. Then there is a random person on the internet who is giving some form of legitimate threat. First, they used to call the police. Now, they connect with the FBI who understands it.

Another individual is an ex-Muslim from London who founded Faith to Faithless, Imtiaz Shams. It is a British group to help the ex-religious regardless of their personal background. He is younger. Syed and Shams argue those – for shorthand – on the Left use racism and the Right uses demonization of brown problem.

Each comes at this with a stereotyped lens in other words with different negative consequences and few positives, especially with the reduction in communication and the shunning of people. The article concludes on the tour and how they feel heartened when hearing stories of triumph in spite of the problems from leaving their respective faiths. The people who go through Faith to Faithless or EXMNA get support that they have been dying for.

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Congratulations: He's Gay!

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 30, 2018

One of the more intriguing collective narratives comes from the sexual orientation and gender identity minority community. Those who find themselves in a precarious condition as internal outcasts of traditionalist, conservative communities.

Many times, these communities amount to the religious communities. Also interesting, the ways in which the description of a traditionalist and conservative community overlaps with the bigoted and prejudicial views. A non-conscious recognition of a cultural and even societal trend in many countries.

One ex-Muslim wrote in the Huffington Post about their own experience as a Muslim and coming out. They wrote an article about the London Pride. There are many, many ex-Muslims fighting alongside and for the rights of the LGBTQ+ communities in London.

Some signs held at the pride parades will say, "Allah is gay." The author's hope was that this would be a possibility in Germany as well. The ability to freely express opinions, even offensive ones, at a pride parade.

He made a t-shirt with the imprint of "Allah is gay." He also made a sign in support of the minority Muslim community who are members of the LGBTQ community. It amounts to a series of activist statements in support of the right to live a decent life as a human being regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. It becomes an act of protect in words. That's it.

A reported, "Gay and atheistic: For fundamentalists, that is a potentiation of evil. However, that this post would trigger such violent reactions, I honestly never expected... My shirt has made me hostile to people, insulting and making mischievous sexual allusions. 'Miserable dirty dog, are not you ashamed (sic) of religions making fun of you.' Or 'I think it's a pity that there are such people like you in the world' - I had to read such sentences."

He received a number of death threats now. He would appear to be a bone fide activist now. You cannot be without death threats in the modern era. One stated: "You say 'Alah is gay'?? You will die tomorrow. I know where your stand is, I mobilize all over Berlin."

This person argues, even as an ex-Muslim, for a rational approach to the theology of Islam because if Allah created everyone then Allah created gay people. It is taken as an insult to say, "Allah is gay," but, in a larger context, this hardly seems to be the case.

He views gay as a positive thing and not negative, so the implied insult to those reading those words are missing the message. At the age of 14, he recounts that he became an ex-Muslim. He was living in Iraq. But then, his dad reported him because the neighbors placed pressure on him.

"I was then arrested and tortured. This memory shapes me to this day. The police of the Kurdish regional government picked me up. In the police station, they interrogated me for several hours and tortured them with electric shocks." He stated, "They made me dance like a monkey - according to the motto: 'You think you're from monkeys? Then dance like a monkey.' After that, I was taken to the juvenile detention center in Erbil (capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq) and again beaten by guards. The other prisoners also attacked me."

With a full 13 days of torture, he was let go with the help from his uncle. The matter created a great stir within the Iraqi media. Then people would call him atheist. That made it nearly impossible for him to live in safe way in Iraq.

Life becomes precarious for many atheists around the world. Of course, many readers here have heard of the banal fact of life, with the death penalty by the state in several countries in addition to the continual death threats.

The violence against women, and men for that matter, to keep them in line becomes another form of social control through the religion connected to the state. Fundamentalist Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Communism harbor the same mentality, whether theistic or atheistic.

They become tied to the power of the state to punish and repress dissidents and intellectuals. Because there is an authoritarian structure with incredible power to wield and set doctrine without the formal mechanisms to think about it; indeed, people are compelled in education and media, and socio-cultural life, to never question it.

As stated, “My case also got a big media swirl because I was still so young. I received mass threats and felt constantly at risk. I had no choice but to flee from Iraqi Kurdistan. I paid a very high price for showing myself out as an ex-Muslim. I fled to Europe to finally be free. That’s why I’ve always spoken out loud here.”

The only choice for this individual was to flee the nation to have some modicum of hope for a better tomorrow. Iraqi Kurdistan became a distant memory, as if some trace of cloud leftover on a sunny day. No more clouds, even the ones you like; however, you still have to deal with the beating from the Sun now.

He went to Europe. Now, he uses the right to freedom of expression to speak his personal narrative and verboten perspective. He reverted to an immature attitude and belief system in his non-belief as an ex-Muslim.

That is, all that he left then became the root of all evil. He felt afraid of the potential for Islamization of a country and the haters of Islam became his friend. He was afraid of the totalitarian ideologies. He still feels afraid and in terror. He grew.

“And I oppose that right-wing populists use my negative experiences with Islam to legitimize their xenophobia. I no longer fight against Islam, but for diversity and tolerance - and for me that includes showing solidarity for progressive Muslim forces. And to support the people who fight for tolerance and acceptance in the Muslim culture,” he opined.

More in the link in the reference.

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Sherif Gaber Months After Arrest

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 25, 2018

If you look at the news cycle some, you can notice a continual stream of common narratives. Stories bound by a common thread of individuals trying to express their fundamental human rights and then others attempting to prevent their expression of those rights.

One of those individuals is Sherif Gaber. According to Friendly Atheist, he was originally arrested in 2013 based on posting on religion. In particular, he commented on his own conversion experience into Islam.

He scurried away from the law enforcement authorities in order to continue making more videos on YouTube. He was at an undisclosed location and then a blasphemy charge was laid against him. This was in March of 2013. He stated that he may be arrested in the near future. He was arrested.

A reported, “He sent a message to his fans saying the police had captured him... though days later, he tweeted that he was free again. But was he safe? What was his status now? There was were a lot of unanswered questions about his safety still up in the air.”

He uploaded a video recently, where he explained the purpose and intention behind what he does for the non-religious community. He thinks that he is making a difference. That he can observe the changes because of his activism through commentary, simply talking.

“And when that many religious people are coming after you, it’s probably because they know their foundation is flimsy and they don’t want anyone exposing it,” the reportage explained, “It takes a lot of courage to do what he’s doing. Wherever he’s at, I hope he’s safe.”

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Anonymous Yemeni Ex-Muslim Woman in Turkey

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 21, 2018

There are the lives of the young, rich, and famous idolized in the fantasies built in the Hollywood movies and Los Angeles culture. An ever-hopeful, youthful vision of the world with infinite amounts of pollyannaish trust in one's fellow human being.

Then there is the opposite notion of a life on the run, in desperation, cut from the protective obligations of the state, fearing for their life while fleeing from family and culture for exercising one's freedom of belief and freedom of religion.

Many Westerners live in the former world; many ex-Muslims live in the latter world. For many ex-Muslims, the trust in one's fellow human being gets transmogrified into the horror of the 'other.'

Because of this fearful life, living on a knife edge of potential death or imprisonment with a deep desire for the freedoms others take for granted and even at times abuse, many ex-Muslims only speak out in anonymity.

An anonymous state expedited by the internet. The questions for the ex-Muslim population is how best to get the word out to garner support and build a movement while protecting the health, wellbeing, and livelihood of others going through the same process of disbelief and escape from fundamentalist religion.

Take, for example, an abridged version of a Yemeni women who fled to Turkey because of the fear of reprisal from family for her lack of belief in Islam, for being an ex-Muslim.

As I reported on the live story:

"This is all based on a real, recent story. One that is ongoing for a 24-year-old young woman from Yemen, who currently lives in Turkey. Amy is an ex-Muslim. Like many ex-Muslims, her story is not uncommon and can be claimed as one sector of the non-religious population subjected to horrendous abuse and disownment by family and community simply for exercising for their fundamental human rights to freedom of belief and freedom of religion. It is within their rights and part of their conscience that they do not share the beliefs of their family and community, by and large, and consider themselves ex-Muslims: apostates."

The woman's chosen anonymous name is Amy. She is black and part of a discriminated and persecuted against group called "Akhdam" or servants. They are referred to as this based on the color of their skin. It is an ethnic- and skin-color-based epithet.

Amy was fearing for her life based on the potential reprisals from family for not believing in Islam anymore. She was an apostate in the closet. Her fear of her father was very real.

She later lived with her mother and married, eventually have 6 children while a Muslim. The reason for the father's potential violence against her for disbelieving in Islam comes in the form of the Islamic mentality of the dad.

"The dad, apparently, reported Amy's disappearance to the Yemeni police and then told them that she has secular ideas and values. She was studying mass communication at the University of

Sana'a. However, prior to finishing her degree – right before, she had to flee Yemen,” as stated in the reportage.

She travelled to Turkey illegally and was jailed for four months with the threat of deportation. However, a deportation would lead to the return to a family and culture that would want to see her dead. She was released with paper after four months and given official papers for a guaranteed, legal stay in Turkey.

Amy spoke about how Istanbul rejected her even though she was able to stay in Turkey. Then an employee in Turkey stated that she is not welcome there. With the papers from before, she had 15 days to stay; however, now, that time limit is up.

She is monetarily broken and unable to find work. So, the questions arise about truly being homeless if she cannot find some form of employment.

Amy stated, “I went to an NGO Called ASAM that is in partnership with UNCHR, but they told me to go to the UNCHR in Ankara. But I do not have the money to go theirs, and also I know that UNCHR only going to make it difficult for me,” Amy explained, “because after applying in UNCHR I will be forced to leave to a new city determined by the government of Turkey, but I do not have the money to go to any city and not gonna be able to rent an apartment again.”

There is no help financially from the UNCHR, or with accommodations.

Because she fled Yemen, Amy was unable to complete her postsecondary degree in full. However, eventually, she wants to complete it.

Will she? Will she be safe? Only the future and support networks can tell.

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Becoming an Ex-Muslim and Living with Death Threats

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 18, 2018

A moderately old story in an article (in reference); however, it is still of note in the news cycle and bears repeating ad infinitum, because the context for ex-Muslims over the globe remains desperate in too many circumstances rather than peaceful in terms of leaving or joining, or staying, in the faith - or a faith for that matter based on the rights to freedom of belief and freedom to religion.

A slightly more intriguing presentation of the information in the reference news article. Nonetheless, the content directs attention to a continual issue for the men and the women in the world who wish to leave a faith in which they lack - ahem - faith.

As many Caucasian males between the ages of 18-35 in North America and Western Europe with a Christian familial and societal heritage, it is natural for those individuals to be the ones to react positively to the New Atheist movement (with the emphases on Abrahamic religions, but also spilling over into radicalism, terrorism, fundamentalism, and irrationality in general) and New Mythologist movement (with the emphases on the mythological import of Christ, informal apologetics and theology for Abrahamic religions, and general association of most mythologies with those Christian elements in the center of the discussion).

These individuals have representatives and increasingly prominent voices. Those popularizers who voice their concerns with Abrahamic religion while harkening to some of the core messages and allegorical-philosophical truths of those traditions.

The unfortunate circumstance for many ex-Muslims, questioning Muslims, and other liberalizing Muslims is the concern over death threats - so health, wellbeing, and livelihood - family and community reactions to their being ex-Muslims or questioning Muslims, or simply thinking more independently on the literal interpretations of both the family and the community.

The questions for them probably begin to orient about who they can look to as a beacon of dissent. The organizations they can see who may help them in their times of need and desperation. The formal and informal mechanisms for them to be able to escape literal family imprisonment and restriction on freedom of movement, which may be truer for the women than for the men.

As noted in the Australian think piece with the newer presentation of the information, there are groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, openly calling for and working towards the killing of apostates. That is, those who accepted or were forced into Islam and then leave should be killed, murdered.

Then you can read the heartbreaking stories of enforced religious practice, of attempting suicide four times, and so on; all acts of desperation by people who wanted a way out but do not know if there is one, or even if there is one known to them are fearful of the consequences.

Here is simply one quote from Rashti in the article: "Domestic violence, honour killings, sexual assault. I've been physically abused by my parents." It really is a series of broken hearts and

people on the backs of literalist and enforced versions of a religion. One woman's greatest fear is that someone will find out that she is an ex-Muslim. Think about that.

Those are not uncommon stories. The questions are how can people find solidarity with others when they are fearful of even going out to look for the help in the terror of being caught by loved ones, family members.

Then when they do go out into the public in social media, the culture and the social world threatens death and hurls invectives, epithets, and blame the victim attacks against the people in stunning cases of overt, and covert possibly too, cyberbullying.

We can do better than this.

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“The Politics of the Headscarf in the United States

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 12, 2018

A new book is out or about to be published. It is entitled *The Politics of the Headscarf in the United States*.

Consider this analogous to a political tract about the economy of political life but, rather placed within the world of the culture, the economy of the culture or, more properly, the sub-cultures extant and moving within the larger society.

The co-authors of the book - Bozena C. Welborne, Aubrey L. Westfall, Özge Çelik Russell, Sarah A. Tobin - place the price tag at Hardcover - \$95.00/Paperback - \$22.95.

The cultural economics of the text focus on the headscarf, which becomes an important issue of identity for many Muslim women and of liberation for many ex-Muslim women.

With the focus of the text within the American geographic landscape and the American-Muslim cultural milieu, we find the conversations on social and political effects of the practice on Muslim-American women, but, I would add, also the impacts of women who have left Islam or who may be considering becoming Muslim in a serious fashion.

All of the authors - and taking this information from the content sketch provided in the link above - argue the head covering is not politically motivated within the American context, but it does affirm Muslim identity in some uniquely American ways.

While working within and going beyond the standard political debates around the notion and suggested practice of the Islamic head covering within the American landscape, the authors point to the simple implications of wearing the headscarf as well as the broader derivative effects of the practice within the United States.

Some issues or concerns come from the lasting impacts on individual and collective identity. The means and ways in which this changes the notion of a diverse democracy and, potentially, the attitudes about the principle of diversity within a pluralistic democracy seen in the United States.

The sense of citizenship and being a part of the mainstream society. The text takes into account both qualitative and quantitative data, assesses and analyzes the information, and then integrates this into the 2,000 - approximately - survey responses from Muslim-American women from 49 states.

There are 72 interviews with Muslim women living in the US. With all the backdrop and content as premises, the co-authors argue the idea of identity and the creation of boundaries with the head scarf derive particular political implications for the future of the American landscape.

Ex-Muslim Comic Sketches

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 12, 2018

There has been some short reportage on something interesting in the world of comics and sketches, which come from the gifted hands of artist Mohamed Ibrahim.

He created MoCartoons. It seems important to provide a basis for the outlets of the non-Muslim and the ex-Muslim with an interest in the depiction of art, satirical and otherwise.

Ibrahim founded the Muhammad by Mohamed series, who is a staunch advocate of both freedom from religion as well as freedom of expression; hence, the comics and other written work.

He had some life in the Middle East and some in the United States of America. He earned a graduate degree and has been working in corporate America. Now, post-Charlie Hebdo, he is working to draw and write comedy through his own works.

Two Sons Want Mother Dead for Leaving Islam

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 30, 2018

According to the 9News, one mother from Australia felt like an “animal” and a “slave” when practicing the tenets and following the beliefs of Islam.

She wants to inspire other women Muslims to empower themselves and be free from the religion. The woman, Nadia, and her oldest daughter, Allawea, are hiding because their own family turned against them for the denouncing of the religion of Islam.

Nadia said, “It is in an honour for them to kill somebody whose turned away from Islam, and their own mother has turned away from Islam so I mean nothing to them... They were screaming we’re going to kill you, we need you dead.”

In October of 2017, the two oldest sons were the ones screaming at her. They began to beat up Nadia’s new husband. Then the two brothers fled the scene of the crime when the police were arriving. The police officers found several rifles in the possession of the two young men.

The weapons’ charges were made; however, the brothers’ location is not known at this time. Now, the mother and eldest daughter live in hiding inside of a safe house. Originally, the woman met the man while in her teens. She fell in love and then converted to Islam.

She continued, “I watched my children giving me their seconds off their plate... and that was okay because I was western and white, and not Muslim.”

The reason for denouncing the faith came from the anti-Western sentiment found within the family in addition to the ex-husband being found to have slept with many other women, which became the basis for the incident in October.

The article concluded, where Nadia stated, “Maybe after today, there will be some women who will say ‘hey I am human, I’m not an animal’ and maybe they will get the chance to be free.”

Freedom and Hiba Tawaji's "Min Elli Byekhtar"

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 27, 2018

Hiba Tawaji is a Lebanese artist and singer. In a recent song entitled "Min Elli Byekhtar," she sung about the freedom from both the removal of the ban on women driving in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the removal of the veil.

Within the video, Tawaji sings on the freedom to drive. In the music video, she is driving in a tunnel. While about to exit the tunnel, one can notice a hijab on her. The symbolism and reality in one with the inability to drive and forced veiling coming to the ability to drive and removal of the veil.

But the great piece of artistry and symbolism, which Yasmine Mohammed exclaimed about, was as, in song video, Tawaji removed the veil, entered the end of the tunnel and exited into a bright and sunny day. It becomes less literal as a song about the ability to drive and the removal of the veil inasmuch as the symbolism of general freedom through living without a veil and driving on one's own, as an adult.

Some of the translations, though potentially wrong, from Arabic to English speak about the realization of not being the same old girl. That is, someone who found a new freedom in the ability to travel in a way unknown as generations before her.

Other lyrics talk about the cage of iron and the impossibility of caging a bird in a prison of iron. Of course, she is the bird, removed the veil, left the tunnel vision, drove away, and off into a sunset of freedom as she grew her wings of independence - and so, with her then, the same for others in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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