



## Those Secular Bigots who Blame Islam for the Cologne Attacks Need to Take a Long Hard Look at their Own Values

It was repugnant and vile; very much characteristic of Charlie Hebdo publications. In its latest edition, this odious magazine featured a cartoon suggesting that drowned 3-year-old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi would have grown up to be a sex attacker like those migrants accused of sexually assaulting hundreds of women in Cologne on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December. German officials have alleged that the perpetrators of the attack were mainly of North African and Arab descent.

As extreme and disgusting as the cartoon was, it was representative of the flood of bigoted accusations against Islam and the nature of Muslim men which have been making their familiar rounds in the right-wing and secular media. Indeed, as soon as news of the New Year's Eve incident broke, the claws of the die-hard secular journalists and press were out. One can imagine they were almost salivating at the prospect of getting their fangs into the so-called dangers of Islamic beliefs and Muslim immigrants. The accusations came thick and fast: that there was something inherent within Muslim men that made them prey on 'white women'; that Islam's misogynistic beliefs view women as temptresses or lower than men, nurturing such attacks; that Islamic laws such as women covering or the restriction of the interaction of men and women fuel sexual frustrations, causing Muslim men to express pent up sexual desires on Western 'non-covered' women. The liberal German newspaper *Suddeutsche Zeitung* for example published a racist image depicting a black hand assaulting the body of a white woman to illustrate an article in which a psychologist claimed that for young Muslim men, any meeting with a woman was a highly sexualised encounter. Some secular media even termed the Cologne attacks provocatively as 'Rape Jihad'.

*"How long before the women of Cologne are advised to stay indoors or even cover their heads?.....If you are doctrinally commanded to cover up your women then the sight of a woman like the lovely, blonde Michelle, who is both uncovered and happily self-confident, provokes temptation, and this makes you angry. That anger is not directed where it should be – at yourself or at a belief system which forbids a woman to move and dress as she pleases – but at the temptress."*

British Journalist Allison Pearson, in *The Telegraph* article, 'Cologne assault: Cultural difference is no excuse for rape',

*"Europe's governments may be desperate to cover it up but Cologne proves that many Muslim men have NO respect for white women... White women are nothing to some Islamic and Arabic men. It's the reason our girls were abused in Rochdale and Oxford and the reason white German women were raped in Cologne."*

British Television Personality and Columnist Katie Hopkins, in *Daily Mail* article, 'Shall I just buy a burka and get it over with?'

*"The confluence of certain cultural mores with particular interpretations of Islam, and particular understandings about Western women, can produce the toxic brew I've experienced."*

British Journalist Jessica McCallin, in *The Telegraph* article, 'Too many Muslim men are misogynists',

*“managing unreconstructed attitudes towards women by newly arrived young Arab men is far harder and more menacing...”*

British journalist Will Hutton, in *The Guardian* article, ‘After Cologne, the uneasy question: is cultural coexistence still possible?’

To strengthen their case, some secular bigots made associations between the Cologne attacks and the assaults on women by migrant youth at a music festival in Stockholm, Sweden in 2014, as well as the sexual exploitation of young white girls and women in the UK towns of Rochdale and Rotherham by Asian grooming rings. The majority of those found guilty of the latter crime were men of Pakistani descent. Allegations were therefore made that there was something inherent within Pakistani or Islamic culture that led Pakistani men to view white women as ‘fair game’. Parallels were also drawn to the sexual assaults on women in Tahrir Square in Cairo at the time of the Egyptian uprising in 2011, the common factor being that Arab Muslim men were again the perpetrators. The *Daily Mail* ran its usual incendiary anti-Muslim, anti-Islam headline promoting this association: *“The Arabic gang-rape ‘Taharrush’ phenomenon which sees women surrounded by groups of men in crowds and sexually assaulted....has now spread to Europe.”* The inflammatory accusation was that this ‘collective sexual harassment’ of women in public places was very much a ‘foreign’, ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’ practice, unknown to the ‘civilised West’ until Muslim immigrants imported it into their societies; and that there was something in the psyché or culture of Arab or Muslim men that was to blame for this heinous act. This concept of ‘taharrush gamea’ was even mentioned in an official report by Germany’s North Rhine-Westphalia State into the Cologne attacks, associating them with the Tahrir Square incidents.

The absurd insinuation was that gang sexual harassment or rape of women was something alien to Western societies and non-Arab men – an insinuation with which the thousands of female soldiers in the British and US army who have been sexually assaulted by groups of their colleagues, or the countless Muslim women gang-raped by Western soldiers operating in Somalia, Iraq and Central Africa would surely strongly disagree.

The hijacking and exploitation of the heinous assaults on women in Cologne to push an anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant political agenda is utterly despicable and irresponsible journalism. Making the subject of sexual crimes, which permeate all current societies, a matter of race or religion, diverts attention from understanding and addressing the true root causes for these attacks which serves as a great injustice to their victims and to women generally. However, this racist view of the ‘savage, uncivilized’ nature of Arab or Muslim men and how they treat their women vs. the ‘civilized, respectful’ manner by which women are regarded within Western secular societies is nothing new. It is essentially a lazy imitation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century racist, Eurocentric, white supremacist, orientalist perspective towards those from ‘foreign’ lands. ‘Orientalism’ advocated the indisputable superior and civilised nature of Westerners and Western culture verses the inferior, backward, and barbaric nature of other cultures and individuals from ‘the Orient’. It taught Europeans that they were living at the height of civilization and that their thinking, qualities, cultures, beliefs, and practices represented the model of ultimate refinement, modernity, rationality, intellectual elevation and progress. In comparison, other cultures and people including Islam and Muslims were presented as depraved, irrational, and immoral. It was a body of ideas that provided justification to Western governments at the time to wage wars against, colonise and pillage the resources of foreign lands under the guise of ‘civilising nations’ by ‘westernising’ them.

Orientalist writers, artists and travellers presented a false ‘exotic’ sexualised image of Muslim women and promoted a view that Muslims were hypersexualised, lecherous, and the embodiment of licentiousness by their nature – all conjured up from their own sexual

fantasises and racist attitudes towards those from the East. One French study in 1903 (cited in MacMaster, 'Colonial Migrants'), described Algerian Muslims as of, "*limited intelligence and completely apathetic,*" given to the vices of, "*dissimulation and dishonesty, distrust and lack of foresight, love of sensuality, lechery and revelling.*" The French governor-general of Algeria in 1898 attributed the rise in prostitution resulting from the French colonisation of the country to the innate over-sexualized nature of Muslims. He said, "*The Arab man's, the native Jew's and the Arab woman's physiology, as well as tolerance of pederasty, and typical oriental ways of procreating and relating to one another are so different from the European man's that it is necessary to take appropriate measures.*" In her book, 'The Arab Women of Algeria' written in 1900, the feminist Hubertine Auclert repeated these orientalist fantasies of the Muslim world, describing the old section of the city of Algiers with pure imaginative imagery as a place of unfettered sexuality where women, "*stretched out on pillows, adorned and covered with jewels, offer themselves, like madonnas on an altar, for the admiration of passerby...*"

From this fantasized view of Muslims, they erroneously reasoned that the Islamic dress and laws which restrict the relationship between men and women were a reflection of the sexualized nature of Muslim men who could not control their desires except by covering up and secluding their women. They also argued that these Islamic social laws demonstrated Islam's view of women as temptresses who needed to be controlled and contained, and objects who were sexually enslaved, existing simply to provide pleasure to men.

Surely it needs to be asked therefore of those current day bigoted secularists who blame Islam and the nature of Muslim men for the Cologne attacks – How can they possibly pride themselves on being modern, progressive, and civilized when they insist on peddling 19<sup>th</sup> century white supremacist narratives, born from Western fantasies and utilised to colonise and plunder foreign lands? Such views belong in the pages of historic fictitious books such as '1001 Arabian Nights' rather than on the pages and broadcasts of modern-day media.

Moreover, these modern-day fans of outdated racist theories seem to also adopt the blinkered view of their forerunners towards the true reality of their own secular values and system. For example, while 19<sup>th</sup> century orientalists accused Islam of sexualising and mistreating women, they conveniently ignored the blatant oppression women were facing within their own societies – societies where women were viewed as inferior to men and as evil temptresses; where prostitution, exploitation and abuse of were rampant; and where they were deprived of basic political, economic, judicial, educational and social rights, including the right to divorce an abusive husband – all under a system which orientalists argued could civilise the world.

Similarly, those secularists who blame Islam for the Cologne attacks conveniently ignore the fact that the perpetrators were not high on spiritual devotion when assaulting those women but high on drugs and alcohol according to Ralf Jaeger, North Rhine-Westphalia State's Interior Minister. He stated that this, "*...culminated in the acting out of fantasies of sexual omnipotence.*" This is not an Islamic phenomenon for the religion prohibits all intoxicants, but a very liberal one; and one that is a strong causal factor of many cases of violence against women.

Such secularists also conveniently ignore the fact that sexual assaults against women by non-migrants and those who identify with secular, liberal values, have become the norm and an annual occurrence in Western music festivals such as Glastonbury and other gatherings such as the UK Notting Hill Carnival and Munich's Oktoberfest where there is an average of 10 reported rapes every year and an estimated 200 unreported rapes.

And such secularists also conveniently ignore the fact that sexual attacks and rapes against women are endemic within secular, liberal societies. Indeed, the secular states of South Africa and India have become notorious as rape capitals of the world. Furthermore, sexual assaults against women, is rife on the campuses of Western universities as in Britain and the US. In the UK, 1 in 7 students have been victims of serious sexual assault or serious physical violence while at university or college according to the National Union of Students. In 2015, the Association of American universities released the results of one of the largest ever studies of college sexual violence which stated that more than 1 in 5 female undergraduates at the US's top 27 universities suffer sexual assault and misconduct. Furthermore, a study into sexual abuse in European countries, sponsored by the European Commission and conducted by Vienna based Fundamental Rights Agency reported in 2013 that 1 in 10 women have been victims of sexual violence in Europe, 1 in 20 have been raped, and 75% of women in qualified professions or top management jobs have been subjected to sexual harassment. A survey conducted by the German Anti-Discrimination Agency found that more than ½ of all female employees in Germany have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment. According to the US Department of Justice, a woman is raped every 2 minutes in America. And in England and Wales, 85,000 women are raped on average every year and over 400,000 are victims of a sexual assault according to the UK Ministry of Justice.

With such sobering statistics that highlight that sexual crimes against women are rampant within Western secular states, why is it not asked – Is there something inherent within secular, liberal culture which gives rise to such heinous acts? Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, and Bangladesh which also implement a secular system and promote its values within their societies also unfortunately suffer from similar appalling levels of sexual assaults against women. Surely then, soul-searching questions need to be asked by advocates of secularism and those calling for greater assimilation of Muslims into secular culture about the toxic fall-out on women of a secular capitalist system and liberal values that promote sexual freedoms and the sexualisation of society; encourage men to pursue their carnal desires with few limitations; and allow the bodies of women to be sexualised, objectified, and degraded by the entertainment, beauty, advertising and pornography industries. It is quite ironic for example that while secularists accuse Islam of viewing women as temptresses, such industries within secular states have been given a free-hand to market the idea of the woman as a sexual temptress, exploiting her feminine charms, and presenting her as a seductress for the sake of profit, with inevitable detrimental consequences on the view and treatment of women within their societies.

So does Islam sexualise women and perceive them as evil temptresses? Do its beliefs increase sexual assaults on women? No, rather it is the converse. Islam views the human nature of men and women as the same. Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا﴾ **“And Allah has made for you mates of your own nature...”** [An-Nahl: 72]. The Prophet (saw) said, «إِنَّمَا النِّسَاءُ شَقَائِقُ الرِّجَالِ» **“Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men.”** Furthermore, Islam describes the woman as ‘muhsana’ – a fortress against Shaytan (the devil).

The view of women as ‘evil temptresses’, has its origins in European Christian tradition and theology rather than Islamic culture. It roots from the Christian belief that Eve was responsible for Adam’s temptation to eat from the forbidden tree. One of the books of the Bible, Ecclesiastes for example reads, *“I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner will be ensnared by her.”* [Ecclesiastes 7:26-28]. Tertullian, one of the early well-known Church fathers wrote regarding women, *“Do you not know that you are*

*each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the Devil's gateway: You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree...You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack....”* (‘The Apparel of Women’, Book 1). And Augustine, another early Christian theologian wrote, “*What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman...”*. Such a belief is rejected by Islamic texts which describe Shaytan as responsible for the temptation of Adam and hold Adam and Hawa (Eve) equally responsible for the disobedience of God and the banishment from Paradise to Earth, as well as establishing that Allah (swt) forgave them both.

Additionally, Islam obliges men to view and deal with women with the highest respect and honour. The Prophet (saw) said, «*اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا*» “**Treat women well.**” Islam also prohibits the sexualisation, exploitation, and objectification of women, or any other action that devalues their status in any way. Indeed, the level of respect that Islam demands men to have for women is reflected in the command to lower their gaze if they sees any part of a woman’s body that Islam forbids him to see. Allah (swt) says, *قُلْ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ* “**Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts).**” [TMQ An-Nur: 30]

Furthermore, rather than fuelling the sexualisation of women or society, the Islamic social laws which regulate the interaction and relationship between men and women prevent this by creating an environment in which the triggering and fulfilment of the sexual desire is directed to marriage alone, hence curbing sexual crimes. The sexual instinct is therefore neither repressed which causes sexual frustration, nor is it constantly evoked which wreaks havoc on societies. Rather it is directed towards that which reaps goodness for family life, children, individuals and society – marriage. This is contrast to generating atmospheres where the sexual instinct is persistently agitated and individuals seek its fulfilment in any manner possible, even if that means assaulting a woman, as seen in secular liberal states. So the Islamic dress code for the man and the woman, the prohibition of the beautification of women in the presence of non-Mahrem men (men to whom marriage is permitted), the prohibition of non-Mahrem men and women socialising or a non-Mahrem man and woman being in seclusion, or the outlawing of extra-marital relationship - are just a few of the Islamic laws which facilitate the nurturing of an environment where the dignity of women is protected and where women feel safe to travel, work, study and pursue other interests free from harassment or abuse. And finally, Islam prescribes harsh punishments for any form of sexual crimes against women, including the death penalty for rape.

So, for those who are cynically exploiting these heinous Cologne attacks to push noxious and divisive anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-Islam agendas.....if you truly want to understand the cause for these repulsive crimes, I’d say look for the answer closer to home! And if you are genuine in searching for a credible solution to sexual assaults on women, perhaps it’s worth taking a closer look at the belief system which you are all too ready to attack: Islam.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by**

**Dr. Nazreen Nawaz**

**Director of the Women’s Section in the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir**