

Homa Arjomand
homawpi@nosharia.com
www.nosharia.com
416-737-9500

This Conference will emphasize on the effects of globalization of political Islam on Women's Rights, the question with polygamy, the Niqab and Honour Killing. As well as the problems of legal pluralism and cultural relativism with respect to women's rights and discussion on separation of religion from the State.

In order to cover all these issues, I will start my speech with a case of a victim of polygamy, child trafficking as well as forced and arranged marriages in Canada; the obstacles and challenges they face with no hope to overcome them unless we progress our laws and regulations to one secular law for all and alter the legal pluralism and cultural relativism for integration.

In the following case, some changes are made to protect the client's identity:

Farideh, at the age of 14, was sent to Pakistan with her mother and uncle in the summer of 2001. She understood that she was going for a vacation but soon after their arrival, she found out that she was to become the second wife of a clerk. She said from the time her uncle's wife told her about the marriage to the night of her wedding, she cried and tried to burn herself. But she was left with no choice and it took 9 years before she was able to return to Canada at the age of 23. By this time, she had two sons 6 and 3 years.

Now her father is pushing her to sponsor her husband. Farideh indicated she would rather die than sponsor her abuser. In a Risk Assessment Check List, she specified the following abuse: pushed, pulled, grabbed, slapped, punched and kicked, objects were thrown at her. And in the section OTHER she described in one full page how she was chained to the ground with her baby in her arms to care for, without food and water for hours. All this was while she was breast feeding her baby. She also described how her husband knocked out two of her front teeth and broke her nose.

In the part of the Sexual Abuse portion, Farideh indicated there was persistent pressure to consent to rape, and she described how she was beaten while her husband performed sex and then he would throw a glass of holy water over her to purify her. All this abuse was to make her more submissive.

Farideh returned to Canada because her mother was dying.

At the hospital, she met a nurse in which she claims changed her life. She was told by her family members that she cannot go against Allah's wish because Allah was testing her, and her husband is her destiny.

History of Farideh's background:

Farideh was born in Ontario and had never been outside of her community. Farideh never had any friends outside of her culture even when she was attending public school. After school, she attended a Madreseh school which is an Islamic School. She never participated in any of the school's activities, never attended any field trip; never went to a movie theatre, never wore pink, red or purple coloured clothes even though those were her favourite colours. Her biggest dream was to attend her graduation when she finished grade eight. And that never happened.

The obstacle Farideh faces:

Farideh will not be able to pay market rate for rent and she will not be qualified for subsidized housing as her children are not Canadian. She will not be qualified for subsidized day care for the same reasons. She is supported financially by Ontario Work which is social welfare but her financial support will be discontinued if she does not resolve the child custody matter soon. She will not be eligible for legal aid certificate in order to hire a lawyer as the abuser is living outside of Canada. And soon if she does not find a way out of this international legal system she will be prosecuted for abducting her own children.

Social obstacles:

Farideh will be forced to distance herself from all members of her community, relatives and her family for the safety of her children and herself which means she will have to leave behind all she had known in her childhood and early youth. She will be disowned by her family members as her action to seek help for separation will not be taken lightly by the members of her community. There are other hidden burdens that she needs to overcome, because of her action: no-one in the community would be willing to arrange any marriage with her siblings. Her brothers might be able to marry a girl from the community but there is no chance for her sisters.

Among members of the community, Farideh is considered a rebellious, a very bad example for all the other girls. However despite, all these obstacles, Farideh has made up her mind to go for separation and save the future of her children, with no money and community support.

Regarding the legal barrier:

If Farideh is forced by the legal system to send the children back to Pakistan, then she needs to make a huge decision. If she returns back with the children, she will face a harsh punishment, not only from her husband but also from the legal system in Pakistan. She knows there are women in Pakistan whose noses were cut off by their husbands or their father, or have no ears because they were not obedient or did not honour the family wishes. She knows in Pakistan murderers can get out of prison with a small amount of money.

Farideh will be facing a long painful legal battle. Her situation is not as simple as child custody, child support and divorce. In her case the husband is living in Pakistan, he is not Canadian and Canadian law does not apply to him at all. The children were born in Pakistan. Her marriage was performed in Pakistan. Therefore nothing much can be done at the Ontario Family Court system.

Farideh is not the only Canadian child of misfortune. There are countless other Canadian children whose civil rights are violated and no-one has ever been put in the spot light for this violation of children's rights.

In Farideh's case, no one has been charged for what they have done to this child: that she was taken to Pakistan at very young age and forced to marry and live in a polygamist relationship: that she was left there with a man more than three times her age to be sexually raped, physically injured and go under tremendous torture.

Our expectation in Canada should be for the Canadian government to arrest and jail Farideh's father and all the ones involved in crimes committed against Farideh, at least under Child Trafficking Act as shamefully there is no criminal act for forced and arranged marriages or early child bride or even polygamy in Canada.

But even with the Child Protection Act in place, the system has failed Farideh for not protecting her rights, for not questioning her parents upon their return to Canada about their missing child; after all they went out of the country with the child and returned without her.

The system managed to fail her without questions asked by any of its concerned citizens. No-one from Children Aid Society ever knocked at her parents' house and asked about the missing Farideh, no school teacher ever questioned the authorities about all those missing children, among them Farideh.

The question is how the government of Canada could neglect Farideh and all the other children like her while there is the Child Protection Act in place? How could the Child's Civil Rights be totally violated in the presence of all involved members of society and involved authorities but no-one speaks out against it?

It is certainly not an error in the legal documents.

The violations of children's civil rights was done simply by implementing a legal policy in such a way that a horrendous crime would be considered an affront to humanity, and the responsibility of the State to enforce this policy. Canada has put in place legal pluralism and cultural relativism which is totally in contradiction with the Universal Rights of the Child and Freedom of Individuals. Under this policy minority rights and religious rights over take the individual rights.

So crimes against Farideh became invisible and not a crime at all. It is consider part of Farideh's culture and religion to be taken out of school forcefully, cross the borders, pass five oceans to her parents' country and forced to marry so young, in a polygamist relationship. It has been said to the members of the greater society that under no circumstances, under Child Protection Act, this harsh and inhuman life journey of Farideh could have been prevented. And we are supposed to believe what we have been told by the legal system.

This unbearable cruelty to children and women should not be tolerated and must be condemned strongly. Zero tolerance is needed to put in place for all repressive laws and regulations. We need to come forward in full force against any policies that pursues cultural and social segregation, and against any practice that undermines the right and well-being of the child.

No doubt when people hear about the case of Farideh, humanity will rise up and help will come from every avenue. I am convinced that Farideh's legal problem will be resolved if not by "lawyers without borders" then by other kind and caring individuals who have heart and compassion for humanity. But this is not the main aim of this conference.

The aim is to help all the vulnerable children and women living in these isolated communities, these communities that are surrounded by thick invisible walls. These walls were built there from the moment the legal pluralism and cultural relativism were implemented in Canada. The federal government adopted multiculturalism as its official policy in 1971, to the disadvantage of women and children, and patronized more the religious and ethnic groups. The Multiculturalism Act was passed by Parliament and proclaimed

in 1988. This broad, unclear act needs to be amended immediately before the life and safety of more women and children are put in jeopardy.

The reality is that these invisible walls need to be demolished and replaced by one secular progressive law for all. Only then can the act of Child Protection be effective and no child will be mistreated.

Right now under the legal pluralism and cultural relativism and under the name of freedom of religion, the Mormon sect can openly engage in polygamy where children as young as 14 can become the wives of one man (as many as 180 wives, I was told or even more in order to become part of the God) and political Islam can find enough legal ground to establish Sharia law in Canada. It was not too long ago that we challenged Sharia Court in Ontario and managed to overcome faith based arbitration for family disputes. That means we closed one gate only but there are many other gates open allowing 7th century traditions to hunt and hurt women and children. And it is not practical to fight these violations one at the time.

Under this policy, women and children are left at the mercy of the sheik, imams, priests, rabbi, old traditions, 7th century customs and religious institutions. As a result there are two or more sets of values and rights in Canada, one being Canadian law and the other being the law of the sect or cult of a community. The only way it can be described is "a state within state". Women and girls are forced to comply with those laws and regulations and the ones who resist as Farideh did, will face harsh punishment. If they are lucky, they might be flogged, raped, pulled out of school, separated from all their siblings, disowned by community and family members or forced to marry, but the unfortunate ones will face death by honour killing, if not by stoning. All these are happening in our back yard.

One must not fail to remember, the reasons why these young brave girls were slaughtered in the name of honor killing is because they all refused the interference of religion and the backward culture in their private lives. They were at the forefront of the battle for individual rights versus collective (minority rights) or let's say religious rights.

Aqsa Parvez 16 in Mississauga, Khatera Haidery 20 in Calgary, Aminat Magomadova, 14 in Calgary, Jaswinder Kaur Sidhu 25 known as Jassi, in British Columbia, Rona Amir Mohammad and her three stepdaughters, Zainab Shafia (19), Sahari Shafia, (17) and Geeti Shafia (13) from Kingstown Ontario. All these victims have been tried and sentenced to death according to family beliefs and culture, and murdered by members of their own family, for not honouring the rules of inhuman traditions and culture. These killings are shamefully honoured, respected and guarded legally, and financially supported by the Canadian government under the policy of multiculturalism and cultural relativism.

These brave girls wished to control their own way of life and lost their lives for what members of the greater society have been benefiting for the past centuries. The most basic rights, the right to individual independence, the right to the necessities of a normal life, the right to have protection of body and mind against any violation, the right to education, the right to socialize and have a social life. Their thirst for these basic rights put them in a death role by the culture and religion of their parents. And we as members of the greater society kept our distance and did nothing to protect their civil rights.

The reality is that honour killing, polygamy, child bride, forced marriage and arranged marriage and stoning have great ties with the growth of the anti-women culture and religious movement, in particular Islamic movements in the West. As soon as the advocates of this movement find the tiniest room to penetrate into legal system, more women will be subjected to violence and brutally slaughtered for refusing to follow the

traditions of their families' culture. It is hurtful to say that Canada under the policy of multiculturalism and cultural relativism has legally provided political Islam and all other organized religious sects, lots of ground to grow.

It is time to stand up firm and build a political campaign that promotes a political solution. The banner of this campaign must be integration and the concept of the equal and universal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their country of origin, race, gender or religion; versus legal pluralism and cultural relativism. Only then we can end all these horrendous crimes against women and children living in these communities.

In response to question of the Niqab and Burqa one needs to tie these two types of veils to rise of political Islam. These types of veils are used for advertising and promoting the agenda of political Islam movement, in the West and so far have served its political desire and political needs.

In fact these types of veils have become the banner of Islamists movement.

It should not come to anyone's surprise to witness not only niqab and burqa but also the hijab being burnt by women at the forefront of every demonstration in countries where political Islam gained power. Women have every right to see this piece of cloth as a tool of oppression as they have witnessed it, lived with its degrading laws and suffered a great deal.

They know the only way out is to make religion stay a private matter for individuals, separate from the State. Not water it down.

The Niqab existed in only marginalized the Arabian Gulf region and came to light after Islamic movement organized itself as state in Iran. The only difference is, back then it was enforced upon women only in a small uneducated isolated rural area, but now these types of veils are willingly adopted by advocators of the Islamic movement, the ones who enjoyed sitting on benches of universities and successfully achieved a degree that could not have been possible if there was not an on going struggle for social progress, freedom, equality between men and women and justice for all, at that time of their study, they were not wearing niqab or any other hijab as political Islam was not yet in power, therefore no recognition of this flag was needed then.

Wearing Niqab or Burqa has nothing to do with their Islamic faith. Niqab or Burqa is a flag of Islamists on rise for the expansion of Political Islam on the international arena, socially, culturally, and religiously on a macro level. And for it, they need to stay in the spot lights of the media every day if not for every hour of the day, the Islamist's existence needs to be acknowledged, in every house hold either by act of terrorism globally or by the outcry over the caricatures of Mohammad or over the halah meat at elementary schools cafeteria, or upholding Islamic fashion under the Eiffel tower, or over space to pray during lunch hours at schools, universities and work places or else the followers of this movement will stop the traffic in the heart of France and England and line up to pray. Of course in all these mocking shows, the niqabist will be seen in first rows. And when they realize there is no more audience, then it is time to show up at public places such as schools, courts or even at election polls in various countries dressed in full niqab and if they are confronted then the niqabists file a complaint with the Human Rights Tribunal. We need to ban Niqab totally from our society, the same way we banned the fascist flag.

As for other forms of the veil (hijab), women should have rights to wear them or not. However when it comes to public sectors such as schools, courts, hospitals, libraries, police stations, the veil should be prohibited totally.

The Islamic veil in any shapes and forms must be banned for children under the age of 18 and prohibition of veiling children must become part of child protection act.

Banning the niqab will certainly push back political Islam and that will help the women's movement to promote their progressive agenda which is advancing total equality in every avenue possible.
