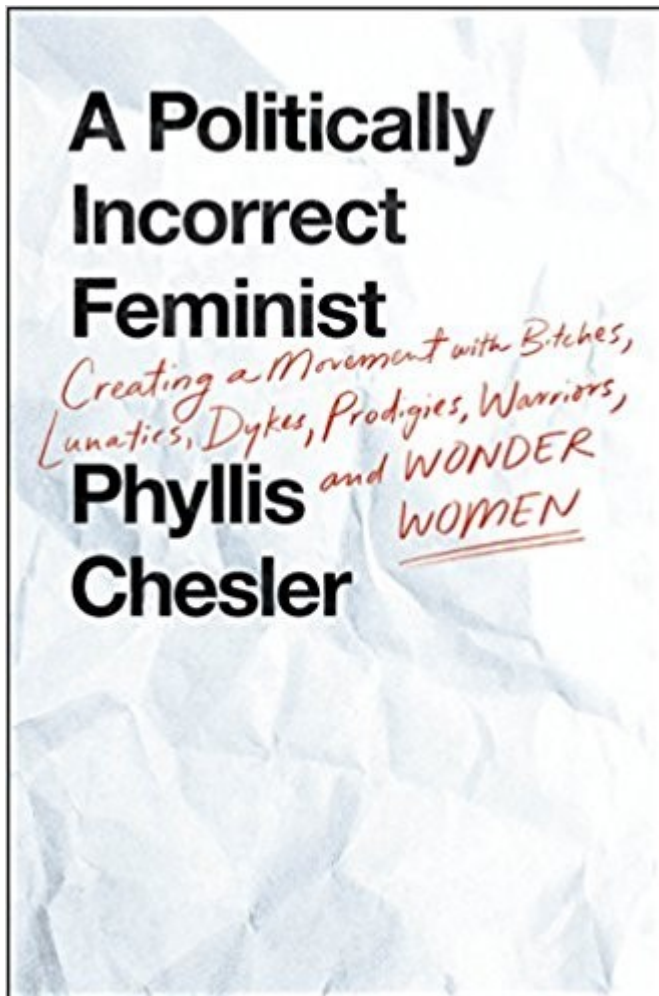


# Beyond the Matrix: Political Activist Phyllis Chesler

by [Jerry Gordon](#) and Rod Bryant (October 2018)



Dr. Phyllis Chesler is a noted American Jewish feminist and is considered one of the founders of the women's movement. She is a noted psychotherapist and expert witness on crimes of violence against women and children. She has veered away from traditional feminism with the rise of cultural relativism and has adopted a politically incorrect variant—the history of that development is the subject of her latest book, [A Politically Incorrect Feminist](#).

But there are more threads to the story of her development. There is her incredible memoir captured in her 2013 book, [\*An American Bride in Kabul\*](#), about a young rebellious Brooklyn Jewish woman who left her Orthodox background and at college, met and married the debonair son of an Afghan diplomat—only to be imprisoned in the polygamous household of her in-laws in Kabul, Afghanistan and then threatened with death if she did not convert to Islam. She was released by her father-in-law to return to the US after falling ill, welcomed home by her distressed parents. The marriage was eventually dissolved. It was her introduction to Islamic gender apartheid and worse, honor shame killing in tribal cultures. The experience was an existential one that formed the basis of her lifelong pursuit of justice for violence against women in custody, employment and civil rights matters. See our January 2014 *New English Review*, "[An American Feminist Fighting Sharia: an interview with Dr. Phyllis Chesler](#)," and our review of *An American Bride...* "[Flight from an Afghan Seraglio](#)."

Her feminist activism which started in 1967 came to national prominence in 1972 with her bestselling book, [\*Women and Madness\*](#). She has been active in the Women of the Wall movement regarding women's worship rights at the Kotel in Jerusalem. She has also been active in developing torah commentary on women's issues. Chesler was one of the earliest Jewish activists warning about [\*The New Antisemitism\*](#) with her 2005 book on the subject concerned about the deligitimization and demonization of the Jewish nation of Israel in the West. Her 2013 book, *An American Bride in Kabul* received a National Jewish Book Award. More recent books by Chesler include [\*Gender Islamic Apartheid: Exposing a Veiled War against Women\*](#) (2017), [\*A Family Conspiracy: Honor Killing\*](#) (2018) and the aforementioned *A Politically Incorrect Feminist* published on July 28, 2018.

This Israel News Talk Radio–Beyond the Matrix interview with her by Jerry Gordon and Rod Bryant was prompted in part by an interview with the sibling of a victim in a Houston, Texas multiple honor killing trial. The trial held in the Harris County district court resulted in a death sentence for the murderer, a Jordanian émigré. See: [\*A Harrowing Tale of Honor Killings.\*](#)

Chesler discusses in this interview her transformative Afghan experience, how the women's movement has been taken over by cultural relativism perpetrated by academic leftists, even propounded in court cases for justifying violence. Cultural relativism in the women's movement has also given rise to anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian Sharia Islamic law advocates prominent among the Washington and National Women's March organizers. She addresses the toll of violence against women within families, especially evident in the dynamics of honor killings. She also provides insight into her latest work on both her own and other leaders in the women's movement, who helped to found it and like her have now been considered politically incorrect.

What follows is an interview with Dr. Phyllis Chesler.

**Rod:** Your book *An American Bride in Kabul* won a National Jewish Book award. How did your experience as a young Jewish woman married to a son of an Afghan diplomat define gender Islamic apartheid?

**Phyllis:** I learned very important lessons. The first was that America is not the worst country in the world but probably the

very best one—a land of liberty and libraries which I didn't find in Kabul. The second thing I learned was that certain barbarism, apartheid, misogyny and cruelty indigenous to a culture or to a region was not caused necessarily by imperialism or colonialism at the hands of the diabolically evil west. The third thing I learned is that in a Muslim country long before the Taliban arose, the level of superstitious ignorance—the paranoia, the thought control, the control of women, the horrifying ladies in burkas on the streets which we see more and more in the West—follow me here now. I had a career as a politically incorrect feminist for many decades after this. I became politically incorrect quite accidentally when I started saying inconvenient truths in the twenty-first century having to do with the rise of anti-Semitism, with the nature of Israel hatred, the cognitive war—especially against the troops and against the West. I found that my lessons in Kabul were invaluable. It was a very expensive education. I nearly died there. When westerners travel to the far wild east, they get sick, they die, they are kidnapped, they are sold into harems, and they get diseases which I got. You pick up dysentery, you pick up malaria, and you pick up hepatitis. I got two of those three so that also was the price of such adventure.

**Rod:** You coined the term, politically incorrect feminist. Does that fairly describe you?

**Phyllis:** In the second wave of the feminist movement in which I was privileged to be alive and be a pioneer, there was always an honorable feminist minority on certain issues. For example, I may have been considered politically correct by the world but in feminist inner circles the fact that I was an abolitionist and opposed prostitution and pornography made me politically incorrect.

**Jerry:** Phyllis you are the author of the best selling 1972 book called *Women and Madness* that gave rise to women empowerment in studies and academia in the West. How has the rise of multi-cultural relativism changed the women's movement and your involvement in it?



**Phyllis:** I was and remain in favor of multi-cultural diversity and I'm a Universalist. I believe in human rights for all—not that I can enforce them for all everywhere—but something weird happened. After Israel won the war of self-defense, maybe a few years after Edward Said's false thesis swept the Western Academy, after post-modernism from France swept the American Academy, suddenly everything changed. Multicultural relativism was in and that means that one culture is no better than another. If you are a formally colonized culture you are better because you are a bigger victim.

Victim worship flourished, people were oppressed, it could be understood but then it got really weird because victims who weren't victims were the most heroic of all. Anyone who wasn't merely just a woman was also the greatest victim ever. No one seemed to understand that Islam has a long history of slavery which continues imperialism, colonialism, conversion via the sword and terrible treatment of dissidents, homosexuals and women. Therefore, this worship of hijab as a symbol of resistance against racism which doesn't exist. I've worked with many tribal women and with Muslim and ex-Muslim women and they don't necessarily want to wear niqab, face coverings, face masks, burka definitely not. Hijabs, sometimes yes. I have no objection to head coverings because it doesn't obscure

your identity in the social reality. Too many feminists now have confused one religion with a race. Too many feminists have assumed that African Americans are like Muslims.

**Rod:** Why is it difficult for post-modernist societies to look at these societies and say there are not moral equivalences to these societies and a modern democratic society? What's stopping them from being able to do this?

**Phyllis:** I think that the campuses have become indoctrinated, for example, anthropology which is the most relativist and the most Western self hating of disciplines. They have prevailed and so people find it very difficult to risk giving up their friends, their social world, their funding and their jobs and being popular and safe by saying "hey the emperor is naked". The emperor is naked. An apple is not an orange. You know, there is reality, not everything is subjective. There is no objective reality, logic, science, reason, and the best of the West is out the window. Very hard to argue with it.

**Jerry:** The Women's March that occurred at the inauguration of President Trump was organized by some people that we normally don't associate with the women's movement and here I speak about people like Brooklyn-raised Linda Sarsour who in fact is a Sharia advocate as well as virulently anti-Israel but there were others in this organization in the women's march who held similar views. How did that occur? Why was it taken over?

**Phyllis:** Very good question. I watched it from afar and I was outraged because these are not feminists. Some of these women were Hollywood actresses and others were funded obviously by

deep pockets that I didn't research and their agenda is not women. They weren't talking about battered women. They weren't talking about incest. They were not talking about unabashed violence. They weren't talking about honor killings or about FGM. They were talking about climate, race, occupied Palestine, occupied whatever. They had a very different agenda and many wore two head coverings. I didn't laugh but I wanted to cry. I have been through too many feminist wars against being objectified sexually to appreciate that. I didn't understand it but then there was the hijab often made out of an American flag and I was really insulted. No one has told them the truth in twenty to thirty years and they are just going along like sheep following the leader. It was a disheartening sight because many of the marchers came out legitimately with earnestness. They had genuine feminist concerns but their leadership did not.

**Rod:** Dr. Chesler, how in the world did a good Jewish girl end up in Kabul married to an Afghan diplomat's son?

**Phyllis:** I grew up in Borough Park Brooklyn in an Orthodox family. I was the smartest "boy" in the Hebrew School but I was not given a Bar Mitzvah. Why? Because I was a girl. The next day I ate non-kosher food for the first time and did not die. I had begun my leave taking from a girl's life in Borough Park when I joined HaShomer Hatzair when I was eight and I packed machine guns for Israel by 1951. I was already a citizen of the world looking for liberation in much larger terms. I would go to college on a scholarship, I would meet this very charming fellow, I think I'm going to impress my parents and I bring him home for Shabbos. Everyone was upset. I believe it drove us together. Now I had no intention of getting married and I had no intention of living in Kabul. He pointed out, however, that if we were going to travel

together, which I wanted so much to do—to see the world, we would have to be married or he couldn't bring me to Afghanistan. I said alright, so we had a civil ceremony attended by one or two people and we packed our bags and we made for Europe. Think of American and Jewish adventurers who are writers who lust for the world and look what I learned and look what it cost and look how far from home I went. I think it's all Karmic destinies. I think this is definitely God's plan or I would not have survived. My parents, God bless them, because when I called them from Idlewild Airport, which what it was called before Kennedy, I said I'm back and they said, stay where you are. We'll come to get you. They understood that they had a rebel, they knew that for a long time and that the rebel had returned home.

**Rod:** How many feminists or do you think former feminists are being disenfranchised with this sort of new progressive sort of politicized feminist movement?

**Phyllis:** I think that feminists peeled away from the late 1960's on because they needed the jobs, they needed to care for their children, and they had practical needs. There was infighting which was always very intense and we were never prepared since we were the girls, we weren't prepared for the kind of battles the boys take for granted and don't take personally. This wiped out so many noble souls who I write about in my new book, *A Politically Incorrect Feminist*. Noble women who sacrificed themselves to save the lives of women and children who were not remembered, who were not named, who the media do not go to for quotes on an issue. Now we are in the 21st Century. We have women's studies which rapidly became gay and lesbian studies, gender studies, queer, transgender studies, no woman left, and no woman in sight. That happened in the universities in the name of political correctness,



fairness, anti-racist redemption and atonement and the activism that we pioneered was no longer—rape crisis counseling and shelters for battered women and many things that we did. We didn't just theorize, we also did stuff and changed reality inch by inch. Now it's rather all digital with the #Me Too Movement, which I favor within reason. It is not clear yet whether it will translate to the real world and whether women working in factories or in offices or in agriculture or women in Pakistan have access. They have been calling out names of men in all of these countries around the world and we basically analyzed it, we condemned it, we had speak-outs about it, we passed laws about it and guess what? It didn't abolish it. Sexual harassment on the job, sex in return for the right to work. For money remains and I don't know how much further the #Me Too Movement will be able to go. I hope that it goes the distance, but I don't much like just high profile names being targeted and I don't much like allegations that immediately lead to dismissal. This is very worrisome.

**Rod:** Do you think that there is any possibility of a revival of true feminism and that people will finally realize this is leading them to no place good?

**Phyllis:** One is commanded to do the work in one's time as you know. Now the work that I have done on motherhood, on custody issues, on the issue of surrogacy as well as trafficking is very solid work. I see that work continues in the world. It's not covered by the media in quite the same way. I mean here's an example: in America, every day children are removed from their good-enough mothers in divorce cases, thousands unjustly. You have a scenario where we have a president that the left hates and he makes me uncomfortable, I have to admit. You have the removal of children from people who are aliens or

illegals or undocumented and it becomes a horror thing, a big nightmare. I'm thinking where is the media, where is everybody as each mother who has tried to protect her child from being raped by a pedophile father? Where are they when the judges give that father custody because there is nothing but silence and confusion and lack of comprehension and no activism? There is a wonderful woman Dr. Maureen Hannah who does a conference of battered mothers who are protective mothers who have lost custody, some have gone to jail, admirable.

**Jerry:** Do you believe that Islamic Sharia law is a violation of both the U.S. and international human rights and do you consider accommodation of Islamic law by our courts a danger to civil rights including those of women in the west?

**Phyllis:** We have to tread as Jews a little bit lightly here because there are Jewish divorces that are submitted to a Beit Din where there is enormous injustice. Similarly, there are Sharia courts where a woman cannot possibly win, the fix is in. So we don't want religion and state to be joined. With all due respect for my love of the State of Israel, it would be better for it to be separated. When you have Muslim countries, the religion is the state, the state is the religion and this is highly problematic. I don't see any advantage to importing that system to the West. On the contrary, I mean just in terms of women's rights, it's disastrous.

**Jerry:** You will be pleased, Phyllis, that I was involved with a successful episode in Florida to get a law passed to essentially provide those protections—particularly for Muslim mothers and children rights.

**Phyllis:** I have been submitting affidavits to judges on behalf of potential honor killing victims who are seeking political asylum. It is a privilege to be able to do this work based on the academic studies that I have published at *Middle East Quarterly* on honor killing. This is a continuation of my work on violence against women. Femocide, you are born female and it's a capital crime and this is tribal it's not Jewish or Muslim, it's Hindus in India, it's Sikhs to a much lesser extent in many places and it's Muslims in the West and in Muslim countries and it's shameful to expose it. One is accused immediately of being Islamophobic and a racist but of course the victims are also victims of color.

**Jerry:** Phyllis, your 2018 book, *A Family Conspiracy: Honor Killings* addresses a rising problem in America. We recently interviewed the relative of a victim of an honor killing by a Jordanian émigré convicted in a trial in Houston, Texas and sentenced to death. Why is Islamic honor killing of concern here in the West and why are Muslim families involved?

**Phyllis:** The case is not at all unusual. What is important is the systematic brutalization, terrorization and subordination of the girls and wives by this Jordanian immigrant and his family. If people read the journalist's coverage, they will begin to get some idea of what it is like to live in such fear under tyranny at home from which there is no escape. There is no exit so the case may be useful for his daughter has escaped which is wondrous. She fled, converted to Christianity and married a Christian. Because her father couldn't get his hands on her, he decided he would torment her by killing her husband, which he did, and her best friend, an Iranian medical student. If he was back in Jordan, or if he was on the West Bank he would walk, there would be no trial. Maybe he would even be seen as a hero redeeming and cleansing his shame, his

honor redeemed. I don't know whether we can say that honor killings are increasing statistically in the West. We certainly have a lot more evidence of them than ever before. They are more common in Europe because there is more Muslim immigration to Europe than there is to America. When I began this research, I had no particular agenda and institutionally funded feminists thought that it would make feminism look bad to be racists. I tore my hair out trying to explain that we are looking at the color of female blood, it's red and it doesn't matter whether the killer was formally colonized or from a persecuted minority or not. People who are relativists relativize everything.

**Rod:** Phyllis, if let's say that this was happening in the Hispanic or the African American communities would they still feel the same way?

**Phyllis:** Yes, they would say that the legacy of slavery is so deep and horrible. I mean look at the black on black bondage that we had in our major cities. It's a no-no to really focus on it. When black people do they are called Uncle Toms and they are shamed. To expose the victims' frailties or failures is a no-no if you are up against the "so-called man" so I think, yes. It's very essential for Americans, for westerners and for Israel, which does help rescue honor killing victims from Gaza and from the West Bank. It's very important that we don't have their blood on our hands if they are living on our soil. We may not be able to change it for Afghanistan, but we certainly should be able to stop FGM in the West which we haven't done yet and we should be able to stop child marriages in the West which we haven't done yet. People are working on these of course.

**Rod:** One of the family members in the final interview right after the sentencing phase in Houston said this is significant not just the fact that we got a guilty verdict but we also have the death penalty. This is going to stand as a landmark decision that could help change how people, politicians and law enforcement agencies should look at honor killings.

**Phyllis:** I wonder, I'm not sure what is new. In the past there were several Palestinian honor killings in America. In one case in Cleveland, a young Muslim woman was shot by her cousins no doubt. But the Muslim community went to court and they said calling it an honor killing is insulting our religion. It's racist and so the judge got rid of the jury, the judge heard the case alone and couldn't without a reasonable doubt find them guilty or innocent so they were let go. In the Houston case, the honor killings were declared a crime.

**Jerry:** I once interviewed a beautiful young girl of Pakistani legacy who live in Ohio. Her parents were both physicians. She described how, among the five sisters, she was considered the most unruly and was battered by her siblings at the direction of her father. She escaped. She converted and ran away. Her story was indicative that violence is endemic to the traditions in these communities and yet remains undiscovered until a tragedy like the one in Houston.

**Phyllis:** Let us keep proper perspective in the West for in non-tribal communities incest is perpetrated and domestic violence is perpetrated. These are hidden crimes rather difficult to prosecute, to charge. Because the woman who is battered may very well still need the paycheck of the man who is battering her to feed her children. I'm not justifying her

staying there but this is an explanation. So the tribal patterns in India for example also are related to enormous poverty and illiteracy, an agricultural life and no laws that are enforced. So, if you want to keep your social reputation intact you have to take that so-called law into your own hands and shed blood for which you are not punished.

**Rod:** How revealing is your latest book, *A Politically Incorrect Feminist* about the women's movement issues and leading figures?

**Phyllis:** Very. I begin with my life and start the feminist story when I entered the movement in 1967. I talk about serious struggles, failures and icons we remember because their work and ideals however problematic were. This despite they were human and ha feet of clay I reveal. I also reveal tremendous sentimentality and affection cherishing a moment in time that will not come again. That has never come again in my lifetime. It's a little funny, it's a little shocking, some say shocking, but it doesn't reveal everything. It's not as intellectual as I would have liked it to be, maybe that is to come. But it is a good story.

**Phyllis:** Thank you, gentlemen.

**Rod:** Thank you and shalom.

[Listen](#) to the Israel News Talk Radio—Beyond the Matrix interview with Dr. Phyllis Chesler.

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