

LGBT teaching protester leads campaign to ban Islam film

The Cineworld chain of cinemas (17 theatres) has pulled the film. The Vue chain (220+ theatres including a cinema near me, and the [branch in Leeds](#)) continue to show it, and it will continue next week. It's a niche interest film anyway so I wouldn't expect it to be showing for much longer. But it running its course is one thing; bowing to pressure from the mob is another.

From the [Times](#) and [Radio Essex](#)

Cineworld has cancelled screenings of a film about the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad which has led to protests outside some cinemas and been branded "blasphemous" by a Muslim council.

The cinema chain said it made the decision to remove The Lady Of Heaven, which was released on Friday, "to ensure the safety of our staff and customers".

A Cineworld spokesperson told Sky News: "Due to recent incidents related to screenings of The Lady Of Heaven, we have made the decision to cancel upcoming screenings of the film nationwide to ensure the safety of our staff and customers."

More than 120,000 people have signed an online petition describing the film as "racist" and calling for it to be removed from all UK cinemas, and protests have taken place in Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield, Bolton, Blackburn and Birmingham.

And in a letter to Cineworld shared on its social media sites, the Bolton Council Of Mosques said the film had caused "much distress to Muslims across the globe".

Vue, another cinema chain, has also reportedly pulled some

screenings, although the film is still listed at some venues. A spokesperson for the chain said: "Vue takes seriously the responsibilities that come with providing a platform for a wide variety of content and believes in showcasing films of interest to diverse communities across the UK. Vue will only show a film once the BBFC (the independent British Board of Film Classification) has assessed and rated a film. The Lady of Heaven has been BBFC accredited and is on show in a number of our cinemas. Decisions about how long a film remains on show are taken on a site-by-site basis and based on a variety of commercial and operational factors."

... a House of Lords peer has described the decision to remove the film as "disastrous" for the arts and "dangerous" for free speech, and critics of the decision have hit out at the film's "censorship". Baroness Claire Fox said the decision to remove the film from cinemas was "disastrous for the arts, dangerous for free speech, a lesson to those who argue identity politics are no threat to democracy".

And some 3,000 people have signed an online counter-petition calling for the film to be supported by UK Cinemas, arguing that "taking it down due to online mobs and bullies is not befitting of a free and progressive country such as the UK".

Malik Shlibak, The Lady Of Heaven's executive producer, told Sky News that the publicity surrounding the controversy was introducing more viewers to the film. However, he said that "dictating" what people "can and cannot watch, what we can and cannot discuss, is a very dangerous thing . . . the solution isn't to stop talking about things that they don't want us to talk about. The solution is to talk about them, to prove and show that we are an open, free society, we are tolerant people."

Which brings us to the report from The Times about one of the men behind the demands to remove the film.

A Muslim protester who once harangued a Labour politician over the teaching of LGBT issues in schools has emerged as a leading campaigner for a film about Islamic history to be pulled from cinemas.

Shakeel Afsar, 35, warned that there would be “repercussions” for screenings of *The Lady of Heaven* as hundreds of demonstrators turned out in Bradford, Bolton, Birmingham and Sheffield to picket cinemas.

Afsar, a property developer who has been a continuous and vocal presence at demonstrations against LGBT teaching in schools, appeared yesterday on Press TV, an Iranian government-owned channel, saying that Birmingham “will not tolerate” disrespect shown to the prophet.

“There will be outcomes from your actions. You will have repercussions from your actions,” he said. “We have been trained from birth that we must defend the honour of our prophet and we will lay our life on the line.”

In late 2019 Afsar was permanently banned from protesting outside Anderton Park primary school in Birmingham after months of hostilities at its gates.

He was also for his behaviour during the Batley & Spen by-election last June, when he confronted the Labour candidate Kim Leadbeater, sister of the murdered MP Jo Cox. Leadbeater had to flee in a car as while Afsar shouted at her.

Another leader of the protests is Abdul Haleem, an imam from Bradford. In a video from one cinema demonstration, he is seen screaming into a megaphone, saying that he will not rest until the film is banned across England. Haleem runs al-Islam Productions, a YouTube channel on which he has published a video entitled “Why are Shia *kafir* [infidels]?”