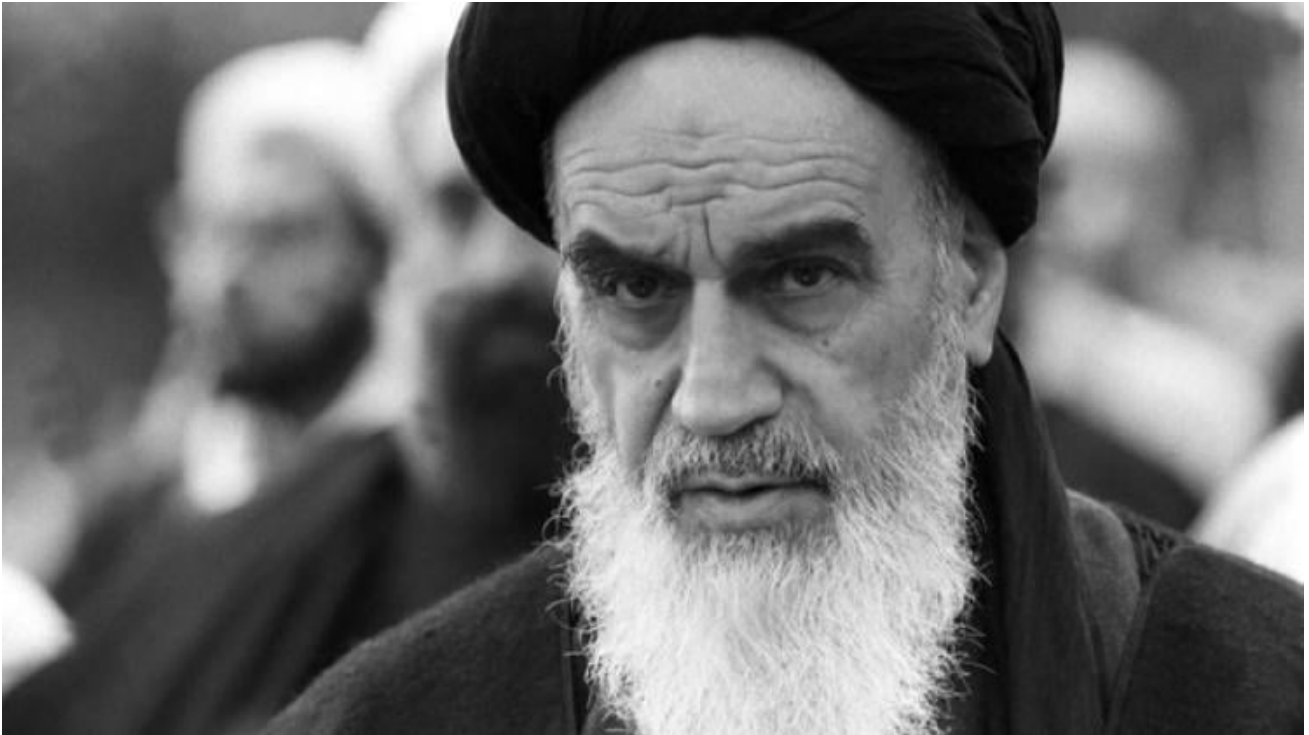


**“There are no jokes in Islam.
There is no humor in Islam.
There is no fun in Islam.”**

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Ayatollah Khomeini famously proclaimed: “Allah did not create man so that he could have fun. The aim of creation was for mankind to be put to the test through hardship and prayer. An Islamic regime must be serious in every field. There are no jokes in Islam. There is no humor in Islam. There is no fun in Islam. There can be no fun and joy in whatever is serious.” His own son said he had seen Khomeini laugh only once. It happened when Oriana Fallaci, the celebrated Italian journalist, was interviewing him, and asked him about the chador, the full-body garment that Iranian women were forced to wear in the new Islamic Republic. In fact, she had to wear one for the interview.

“How do you swim in a chador?” Fallaci asked. “Our customs are

none of your business. If you do not like Islamic dress, you are not obliged to wear it," Khomeini replied. "That's very kind of you, Imam. **And since you said so, I'm going to take off this stupid, medieval rag right now.**" She removed her chador. The interview was called off.

After a day had passed, Khomeini apparently had reconsidered, and **Fallaci came back to interview Khomeini; his son Ahmed had asked her not to mention the word "chador" again. But Fallaci did. And Khomeini laughed. After the interview was over, Ahmed told her that it was the only time in his life that he had seen his father laugh.**

Last year the Iranian government showed that there is indeed no humor in Islam and no fun in Islam. It shut down a leading newspaper, Sedayeh Eslahat, because in one line of one article, the teeny-tiniest of little jokes was made. Almost a year later, the paper remains closed; there is apparently no sufficient penance for humor.

[Here's the story:](#)

Reports say Sedayeh Eslahat ordered shut by top prosecutor for 'desecrating' family of Prophet Muhammad's grandson.

Iran's top prosecutor has ordered the closure of a reformist newspaper on charges of "insulting" Shia Islam, according to media reports.

Mohammad Jafar Montazeri ordered the shutting down of Sedayeh Eslahat for "desecrating" the family of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Imam Hussein, the Fars news agency reported on Friday.

The article that caused offence was about a female-to-male gender reassignment surgery, according to The Associated Press, which cited Iranian media reports.

It was published on the newspaper's front page on Thursday

and carried the headline: "Ruqayyah became Mahdi after 22 years."

Ruqayyah was the daughter of Hussein and the article was published during Muharram, a holiday in which Shia Muslims mourn the Imam's death.

'According to Shia Islam, Mahdi is the name of the 12th Shia Imam who has lived since the 9th century.

In a letter published by Fars, Montazeri said the article caused "protest during these days of sorrow", and ordered the editor of Sedayeh Eslahat be punished over its publication.

Iran is ranked 164th out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) press freedom index.

In August, Iranian courts jailed seven journalists and ordered them to be flogged publicly over their coverage of protests by the Dervish minority.

The Committee to Protect Journalists said the "horrifying sentences laid bare Iranian authorities' depraved attitude toward journalists."

The Islamic Republic clearly does not believe in a free press. It is ranked 164th out of 180 countries in press freedom. Also last year, it shut down a news outlet focusing on Iran's Gonabadi Dervish minority, which had reported on protests by the dervishes, Sufi Muslims long mistreated by a Shi'a establishment that disapproves of their ways. Two of the outlet's editors received long sentences. A Tehran Revolutionary court sentenced news editor Reza Entesari to seven years in prison, 74 lashes, two years of exile in the northeastern city of Khaf, a two-year ban on leaving the country, and a two-year ban on political and media activity.

Another editor, Mostafa Abdi, received an even more severe punishment. Abdi was sentenced to 26 years and three months in

prison and 148 lashes, in addition to two years of exile in the southeastern province of Sistan Baluchistan and two-year bans on leaving the country and engaging in political and media acts.

In the summer of 2018, there were large anti-government protests in many Iranian cities. **Angry crowds shouted “Death to Khamenei” and “Reza Shah,” as well as “Death to Palestine” and “Leave Syria Alone and Deal With Iran.”** No newspaper in Iran dared to cover these protests, but of course, videos of the crowds, posted to social media, could not be stopped.

But what was being objected to in the Sedayah Eslahat case was not the contents of the story, but merely a little joke by the editors that apparently was deemed sufficiently “sacrilegious” to warrant not a fine, or a temporary closure, or the firing of an editor, but rather, the shutting down of the whole newspaper. The article was about gender reassignment surgery. It reported; it did not endorse. But the editors thought it would be mildly funny to describe the female-to-male change, in an allusion all Shi’a would instantly recognize, as being one where a female humorously called “Ruqayyah” (the daughter of Imam Hussein, grandson of Muhammad), having waited 22 years for the operation (the girl in the story was apparently 22), changed – remember, it was a joke, just a joke, for god’s sake – into the male “Mahdi” (the Mahdi is the name of the 12th Shia Imam who, the Shi’a believe, has been living, though hidden, since the 9th century). It was not meant to be disrespectful – the editors would have had to be madmen to try that – but rather, an affectionate allusion that all Shi’a would instantly recognize.

This is something the Iranian regime’s dour masters have a hard time comprehending. It’s what sane people of a normally humorous bent call “a joke,” or, if you prefer, *une blague*, *uno scherzo*, *ein Witz*, *un chiste*, *shutka*. The Iranian editors, their newspaper now closed for almost a year (with no indication that it will ever reopen), and awaiting their own

personal punishment, showed they have a sense of humor. Those in the regime who shut them down, for a single sentence clearly not meant disrespectfully, following the example of their Glorious Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, on the other hand, clearly do not.

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