

Western Feminists AWOL in Supporting Abused and Dissident Muslim Women

by Phyllis Chesler



Muslim and ex-Muslim feminists and dissidents have been risking torture and death in the [East](#), [Africa](#), and the Far East by refusing to wear the hijab and by adopting other Western ways.

Bizarrely, Western feminists and accomplished and powerful women, including [donning the hijab](#) as a gesture of culture “sensitivity” and as a [reported](#) Dec. 27.

Something is radically wrong with this picture, and I’ve been writing about [it](#) for more than 20 years [book](#) [book](#). My strongest allies are brave Muslim and ex-Muslim women and men,

as well as other tribal feminist activists (Sikhs, Hindus). With exceptions – like [Yasmine Mohammed](#), a Canadian citizen of Egyptian and Palestinian ancestry, just published a dramatic and heartbreaking memoir, [Woman's Inhumanity to Woman](#), a book that major feminist leaders in the West cautioned me not to publish lest the “men use it against us.”

But Yasmine understands:

“Quite often, unfortunately, in misogynistic societies, mothers are vicious to their daughters. Exerting power over their (female) children is the only domain where it is acceptable.”

Yasmine is taught to bow to her mother every morning, to literally kiss her mother's feet. She is sleep-deprived, forced to rise before dawn to memorize the Qur'an. Yasmine's mother ignores the fact that her husband (Yasmine's stepfather) is “molesting” Yasmine and participates happily in her daughter's being beaten, hung upside down from a hook “like a dead animal” so that the soles of her feet could be whipped. Yasmine dealt with the pain inflicted by the torturous punishments by escaping her body, “disassociating” is the word currently used in psychiatry.

Like other victims of torture, and prisoners of war and combat, such extreme childhood abuse leads to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is rarely valorized or viewed compassionately when the sufferer is a woman.

Eventually, Yasmine's mother forces her into an arranged marriage with a man – whom the mother herself covets and endlessly tries to seduce – who turns out to be an al-Qaida operative who rapes and beats her. He flees—but is ultimately jailed in Egypt as a jihadist.

If I had not read at least 50 other memoirs published mainly by Muslim and ex-Muslim women, but also by or about Sikh and Hindu tribal childhoods, all of which detail similar

childhoods, I would probably view Yasmine's tale as a one-off. However, it is a terrifying typical account of growing up in a tribal family, trapped with a mother whose only power resides in tormenting, breaking, controlling, and destroying her daughters.

For similar examples of normalized extreme child abuse, we have Ayaan Hirsi Ali's [Veiled Atrocities](#)[Unworthy Creature](#), Jasvinder Sanghera's [The Girl with Three Legs](#), and Souad's [Soraya Mire](#) writes about her mother's insistence that she be genitally mutilated and about what happened when the butchering went south. Doctors wanted to open her scar but her mother refused, thus sentencing Mire to a lifetime of pain caused by edema, inflammation around the scar, a permanent urinary tract infection...a vaginal obstruction, blood clots, and a swollen abdomen." Her mother refused surgery: "Tell these doctors I respect their opinions but they have to show respect for our life."

The scar sealing her vagina was proof of Soraya's virginity.

Then, Soraya was married off to a first cousin who happened to be a sadistic drug addict. He torture-rapes her on their wedding night. Soraya turns to her mother for help—to the woman whose values Soraya herself has internalized.

Thus, for years, Soraya herself refuses to open her scar. She finally does so.

Many abused victims, both Muslim and non-Muslim, often return to their families for help. In the West, abused women tend to marry men who abuse them. Tribal women are forced into arranged marriages in which they are routinely abused. Too many face honor violence from relatives if they step out of line even slightly.

Soraya begins to help other genitally mutilated African women. After receiving a Winnie Mandela Award for the Upliftment of African Women at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in

New York, she rushes to call...her mother! "Mother listened calmly, then said: 'You would win all the awards and become famous but you will always be nothing to me.'"

Like Soraya, no matter how extreme the abuse, both Yasmine and Sunny continued to cling to their mothers, unable to give up the illusion of connectedness. All three return again and again to the mothers, who continue to express nothing but hate for their daughters.

Girls who have suffered such extreme abuse also have identities which are defined only as that of a daughter, sister, cousin, and wife; they would have a hard time breaking free, even to save their own lives. They do not exist, psychologically, as individuals and have been taught that they do not really deserve to live. This is what got me interested in [associated](#) with successful escapes from [The Other Muslims: Moderate and Secular](#), and [posited](#) that such ownership, coercion, and forced "covering" of women could be correlated with support for, or even the perpetration of, violent jihad. Common sense suggests that this might be the case but hard evidence eludes us. At the very least, such Sharia-compliant family control of women may function as a breeding ground for infidel hatred and for blood libels against Jews.

Therefore, I very much look forward to Abigail R. Esman's forthcoming book from Potomac Press on this very subject. Here is Esman, in a personal interview about this work:

"The oppression of women is closely related to a tendency towards violence ... Since the abuse of women and a warrior-hero view of masculinity are inherent to honor cultures such as Islam (and often as well in Latin America), there tends to be a good likelihood that men who grow up witnessing the abuse of women – and especially those who are abused themselves as boys – will grow up to be violent and to associate their manliness and honor with violence and conquest. This makes them easily radicalized by jihadist recruiters who promise them eternal

honor, eternal admiration (love), confirmation of their manliness, and power.”

First published in the [*Investigative Project on Terrorism.*](#)