

Western Women Converts to Islam: Yvonne Ridley

By Phyllis Chesler

Recently, Julia Hartley-Brewer, a British journalist, interviewed Yvonne Ridley, a convert to Islam, an Islamist, and a pro-Hamas True Believer. Long ago, when I debated Ridley on Al-Hurrah, she dressed like either Lawrence of Arabia or like a male member of the Taliban. Here is Hartley-Brewer's interview.



Hartley-Brewer lambasted her with the truth, often reducing Ridley to silence.

Yvonne Ridley, a convert to Islam, an Islamist, and a supporter of Hamas, really went too far in this interview. She seemed obtuse, became speechless; was no longer a firebrand ranter. If Ridley were capable of shame, she would or should be mortified by her performance.

Ridley insisted that Hamas had been “kind” to the Israeli hostages and had even given them “goodie bags;” that if anyone had ever been tortured or murdered it was innocent Palestinian Arabs in Israeli prisons and in mass graves. Ridley also focused on one—only one—prisoner whom the Israelis returned to Gaza, a man who also looked as “gaunt” as the three Israeli hostages who have just been freed, the three who looked as if they’d just been released from Bergen-Belsen or Auschwitz. Hartley-Brewer pointed out that this lone former prisoner was actually a cancer patient, whom the Israelis had been treating in a first-rate hospital.

If you don’t believe this, please [watch the interview](#). Enjoy it. I certainly did.

Some Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim women have been forced into becoming human homicide bombers: either the particular Arab Islamist terrorist group would threaten to expose the woman’s alleged sins to her family who would honor kill her and shame her children forever—or, she could go out in a cloud of glory by killing Jews, Israelis, or other Muslim women and children at prayer. Her family might also receive good money for her murderous act. Read [Anat Berko](#), the Israeli criminologist, about this.

Some Western women, lured by the wild, wild East, have donned burqas, worn hijab, married ISIS fighters—or, like Ridley, or British journalist Jan Goodwin, have dressed like Lawrence of Arabia, or like a member of the Taliban, turbanned headscarf and all. Goodwin actually posed with the mujahideen in full Taliban dress for the cover of her book. (She was not kidnapped or held for ransom). Both Ridley and Goodwin, are extreme anti-Zionists.

Some Western women flee the obligations of freedom or are, like Keats, more than “half in love with easeful death.” Some are just plain crazy.

For example, there's the case of [Margaret Marcus](#), aka Maryam Jameelah, a mentally unstable Jewish-American woman who converted to extreme Islam. Jameelah left America in the 1960s to become a chief propagandist (in English) for radical Islam in Pakistan. Mawdudi was her mentor and protector. (Maulana Mawdudi was a founder of Jama'at-i Islami in India and in Pakistan). Jameelah wore niqab and/or a burqa. As Margaret, she had done serious time in a psychiatric asylum, and as Jameelah it also became clear that she was a difficult, "crazy," and impossible woman. Like other converts she was also an anti-Zionist. Deborah Baker has written a very fascinating biography of this unusual woman.

Here's what you need to know.

When an infidel is held captive in a Muslim country, they usually convert in order to save their life, to please their captors, or because they are lost or unstable to begin with and find that Islam offers the kind of rigid discipline and communal support that may lead to greater (more regimented) stability and social approval.

In 2001 after 9/11, British journalist Yvonne Ridley was captured by the Taliban on September 28th and held for ten or eleven days. She had entered Afghanistan illegally clad in a burqa but was discovered and viewed as a spy. The British High Commissioner to Pakistan negotiated for her release with the Taliban Ambassador, Mullah Abdul Saleem Zaeef, in Islamabad. She promised her Taliban captors that after her release she would read the Koran. And when she did—she found it to be a document of "liberation for women" and she converted. Instantly famous, Ridley continued to receive attention for her conversion and for her strong anti-Zionism and defense of Muslim causes around the world, especially in Palestine.

However, Ridley is not an accurate recorder of facts. When I debated her on Al-Hurrah, she tried to intimidate me with a formulaic rant about how the "blood of our Muslim brothers

(is) flowing in the streets of Palestine," etc. She was all decked out à la Lawrence of Arabia, with vaguely male, not female, Muslim attire. Said I: the gravest problem is that of Muslim-on-Muslim violence, but she ranted on.

As the author of [*An American Bride in Kabul*](#), which recounts my five months in captivity in a harem—a captivity which began as a romance with a very westernized Afghan man whom I eventually married—I have been accused of a) only being held captive for five weeks; b) being an utter, non-feminist fool for ever having anything to do with the man who once held me against my will even if it was for “love.”

For the record, I wore American jeans and sneakers when I was in Kabul and sometimes, very fashionable tailor-made suits. I refused to don even the long, filmy headscarves that my mother-in-law left in our bedroom for me. Unlike my sisters-in-law, I did not wear a long coat or gloves. I guess I’ve always been something of a badass.

And yet: in my years of subsequent work with dissident, feminist, and religious Muslims, perhaps, just perhaps, I am still captive to my kinship with the wild, wild East; still under its uncanny and forceful spell; still carrying out my Afghan husband’s mission to modernize and elevate his people.

Kidnappings are a permanent way of life in the Islamic world; they are undertaken for ransom and revenge, out of lust, when one is in need of a domestic or sexual slave, and as a form of communication with one’s enemies, be they intimate or foreign. In short, one violently takes what one covets or requires. There is no prohibition against doing so.

Westerners and other infidels have, notoriously, been captured, albeit by strangers and not by husbands, in the Wild East before. Barbary Pirates attacked shiploads of Europeans and sold the male captives into slavery and the female captives into harems. The blonde French-Caribbean mother of a

future Sultan was brought to Turkey in chains. Such kidnappings were so commonplace that both Mozart and Rossini featured the theme in their respective operas, *Abduction from the Seraglio* and *An Italian in Algeria*.

I pray for the release of all the Israelis taken hostage and held far below the earth in dark and airless tunnels. I fear what might be the beginning of World War Four—but I hope that President Trump merely makes a deal of some kind that we all thought was impossible.

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