

Blame it on the West!

Es ist klar: für die konkrete Lage im Nahen Osten haben der US-Imperialismus und dessen europäischen NATO-Helferlein in verbrecherischer Blödheit die Grundlagen gelegt, die Voraussetzungen für die Entstehung des Islamischen Staates wurden durch das Chaos nach den Interventionen geschaffen. Im Kalten Krieg hatte es Tabuzonen gegeben, wo sich die jeweils andere Weltmacht nicht direkt einmischen konnte, nach dem Konkurs der Sowjetunion fiel das weg und die Islamextremisten konnten nach den letztlich zielmäßig gescheiterten US- und NATO-Eingriffen vororts ihre Positionen errichten und ausbauen. Aber deswegen ist trotzdem nicht der Westen für die Inhalte der islamischen Lehre und für das danach ausgerichtete konkrete Handeln der Islamisten verantwortlich.

Von der Site <https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com> stammt der folgende englische Text von Jerry Coyne¹:

At last it happens: a professor blames ISIS's² sex slavery on the West

We're used to leftist apologists blaming everything done by Islamic terrorists as the fault of the West and not the result of religious beliefs. This is of course a form of apologetics that simultaneously exculpates religion, satisfies the masochistic West-hating of many leftists, and patronizes Muslims: as underdogs, their behavior can't lie within themselves, but in their stars - i.e., us.

Of course a problem with the "blame colonialism" thesis is that much Muslim violence is directed towards other Muslims (Sunni vs. Shia, for instance), or against groups like the Yazidis that aren't responsible for "colonialism." Further, if you read Lawrence Wright's great book *Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*³ (a Pulitzer Prize winner), you'll hear a persuasive case that the origins of the Muslim Brotherhood, and hence its successor terrorist organizations, lay not in colonialism but in pure hatred of the West's immorality and modernity.

Nevertheless, the West-bashers and Muslim apologists persist. And now they've jumped the last shark, for we have, in the *PuffHo*, a piece that not only claims that the ubiquitous sex-slavery and rape by ISIS members has nothing to do with Islam, but that it's actually the result of Western perfidy.

The author is Kecia Ali,⁴ an associate professor of religion at Boston University, and her piece is called "The truth about Islam and sex slavery history is more complicated than you think."⁵ (When you see the words "more complicated than you think," you know you're in for some apologetics). Her piece was apparently motivated by a recent NEW YORK TIMES article⁶ on ISIS's "theology of rape" by Rukimi Callimachi, a piece I wrote⁷ about recently. Callimachi's piece is mandatory reading.

In brief, Ali's arguments are these: yes, ISIS practices sex slavery, but that the practice is not inherent in Islam, as some Muslims don't approve of it. Further, other societies had slaves, too, so human bondage is not uniquely Islamic. (Duh! Is any nefarious behavior limited to only one religion?). Further, ISIS's sexual depredations are publicized by Western media only because they fit into our desired narrative of Islamic "barbarity". Finally, the sexual abuse is all our fault: we invaded Iraq, and the U.S. Constitution permits slavery (!!!).

In short, Ali's argument is so flawed that it is, as Wolfgang Pauli reportedly said about sloppy thinking in physics, "not even wrong."⁸

Her arguments:

1. Many Muslims don't sanction slavery and sex slavery, so ISIS's position isn't ubiquitous; ergo, it's not religiously based. Ali's quote:

Though ISIS soldiers attribute religious merit to enslavement of Yazidi girls and women, many other Muslims, like those ISIS criticizes in its propaganda, oppose its actions and categorically reject the possibility of contemporary slavery. Callimachi suggests that "Scholars of Islamic theology disagree ... on the divisive question of whether Islam actually sanctions slavery." She quotes me expressing the position that "sexual relationships with unfree women" were "widespread" in the seventh century, and not "a particular religious institution." Princeton theology researcher Cole Bunzel, her opposing voice, disagrees. He points out, reasonably, that repeated scriptural

¹ Wikipedia über den Autor: Jerry Allen Coyne ist ein US-amerikanischer Professor für Biologie mit dem Fachgebiet Artbildung an der University of Chicago. Neben seiner wissenschaftlichen Arbeit auf dem Gebiet der Evolution tritt er als öffentlicher Intellektueller auch für seine philosophischen Positionen ein, insbesondere für Naturalismus, Atheismus und Determinismus.

² Im englischen Sprachbereich wird häufig immer noch die Bezeichnung "ISIS" - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant - für den bei uns "IS" - Islamischer Staat" genannten Bereich benutzt.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Looming_Tower

⁴ <http://www.bu.edu/religion/people/faculty/bios/kecia-ali/>

⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kecia-ali/islam-sex-slavery_b_8004824.html

⁶ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html?_r=2

⁷ <https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2015/08/14/the-islamist-theology-of-rape/>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Not_even_wrong

and jurisprudential references to slaveholding (which include the permissibility of sex with "those your right hands possess") exist. While he notes that "you can argue that it is no longer relevant and has fallen into abeyance, ISIS would argue that these institutions need to be revived." This is a fair representation of ISIS's position. Yet this does not mean, as critics of Islam would have it, that the Islamic State's position on the legitimacy of owning - and having sex with - slaves is unquestionable. (For premodern Muslim jurists, as well as for those marginal figures who believe that the permission still holds, the category "rape" doesn't apply:⁹ ownership makes sex lawful; consent is irrelevant.)

Yes, there's disagreement among Muslims on this issue, but only because slavery is currently seen as immoral by some. But that isn't the case in the Qur'an, nor is it in the Bible. As Ali admits, the prophet Muhammed himself owned slaves, including female ones whom he impregnated. Christians have retreated from the Old Testament's approbation of slavery, but ISIS is not like modern Christianity. ISIS is a group that wants¹⁰ to return to the "fundamentals" of Islam, restoring the original caliphate - a caliphate that, of course, permitted sex slavery. Ali adds this:

Others scholars point out¹¹ that just because the Quran acknowledges slavery and early Muslims, including the Prophet, practiced it doesn't mean Muslims must always do so; indeed, the fact that slavery is illegal and no longer practiced in nearly all majority-Muslim societies would seem to settle the point. It is one thing for committed religious thinkers to insist that scripture must always and everywhere apply literally, but it is ludicrous for purportedly objective scholars to do so. Anyone making that argument about biblical slavery would be ridiculed.

Indeed, but recall that the Qur'an is taken far more literally as "scripture" by Muslims of all stripes than is the Bible taken literally by Christians. Ali's argument here is that because some Muslims don't accept slavery, then sex slavery doesn't come from religion and, in fact, that it's *wrong* to take it from religion. That's as fatuous as claiming that because Orthodox and Conservative Jews observe the Sabbath punctiliously, while most Reform Jews don't, then observing the Sabbath doesn't come from religion.

In truth, ISIS is perhaps the *truest* adherent to the original form of Islam, while Muslims who oppose sex slavery, moral as they are, are deviating from the roots of the faith.

2. Because other societies did it too, slavery wasn't particularly Islamic. Ali:

Still, early Muslim slavery (like early Muslim marriage) wasn't particularly a religious institution, and jurists' ideas about the superiority of free over slave (and male over female) were widely shared across religious boundaries.

. . . In the thousand-plus years in which Muslims and non-Muslims, including Christians, actively engaged in slaving, they cooperated and competed, enslaving and being enslaved, buying, selling and setting free. This complex history, which has generated scores of publications on Muslims and slavery in European languages alone, cannot be reduced to a simplistic proclamation of religious doctrine.

And, finally, since other tyrants in the Middle East promote sexual abuse for ideological reasons, it can't be religious:

By focusing on religious doctrine as an explanation for rape, Americans ignore the presence of sexual abuse and torture in Saddam Hussein's Iraq¹² and in Assad's Syria¹³ by the regime and other factions¹⁴ in its vicious ongoing war.

This is the argument that if some evil deeds are practiced by diverse societies, and for diverse reasons, then religion is exculpated. It's like saying that because Jews cut off the foreskins of their male infants, and so do Muslims, then that's not based on religion *at all*. I'm distressed, but not surprised, that a scholar like Ali can make an argument like this—one that exculpates Islam as a motivation for *any* evils. But this is what we've learned to expect from left-wing academics; and I'm sad to say that my beloved Left is now practicing such intellectual sleight of hand.

3. The West is exaggerating the dimension of the problem. Get this:

None of this is to deny the horror of the systematic rapes Callimachi reports or the revolting nature of the theology she describes. It is to point out that there are reasons why the story of enslaved Yazidis is one that captures the front page of the *New York Times*: it fits into familiar narratives of Muslim barbarity.¹⁵

⁹ http://www.academia.edu/2083376/Rape_in_Islamic_Law_post-print_please_cite_accordingly

¹⁰ <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>

¹¹ <http://thecnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/2014/11/05/isis-says-islam-justifies-slavery-what-does-islamic-law-say/>

¹² <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=198440#REF-JOC40488-1>

¹³ <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/04/syria-has-a-massive-rape-crisis/274583/>

¹⁴ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/18/the-women-in-the-middle-of-the-war/>

¹⁵ <http://ideas.time.com/2013/11/01/do-muslim-women-need-saving/>

Now *there's* West-bashing raised to a high art! Although the *New York Times* may have a liberal slant, the Yazidi story (which was extremely powerful) is only one of a series on ISIS's actions, and it's there not because it demonizes Muslims, but because it alerts us to the horrors going on in the Middle East, horrors that we all must understand and ultimately address.

4. Finally, it's all the West's fault anyway. Ali's last paragraph gives the game away:

In focusing on current abuses in the Middle East, perpetrated by those claiming the mantle of Islam, Americans - whose Constitution continues to permit¹⁶ enslavement as punishment for crime - deflect attention from partial U.S. responsibility for the current crisis in Iraq. Sanctions followed by military invasion and its brutal aftermath laid the groundwork for the situation Callimachi describes. Moral high ground is in short supply. The core idea animating enslavement is that some lives matter more than others. As any American who has been paying attention knows, this idea has not perished from the earth.

Please, Dr. Ali, could you tell us: given ISIS's aim of restoring the Caliphate and its murder of other Muslims and non-colonial Yazidis, how our invasion of Iraq, dumb as it was, "laid the groundwork for the situation Callimachi describes"? Is our invasion of Iraq morally equivalent, as you imply, to the rape, torture, and enslavement of thousands of Yazidi women, and the murder of their husbands and sons? Are we to be held responsible for every act of torture and brutality committed by terrorists in the Middle East?

I reject that claim, and make the counterclaim that Ali is trying to exculpate not only Islam, but Muslims, from the acts they commit, blaming those acts on us instead. That's false and patronizing, as well as unscholarly and disingenuous. Ali has a bill to sell, and is clearly not an objective scholar.

As for the US Constitution permitting enslavement, well, click on the link Ali provides, and it takes you to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, to wit:

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

That eliminated slavery and peonage in the U.S., a decision buttressed by the Peonage Act of 1867, which prohibited holding people in involuntary servitude until they work off debts. If enslavement and involuntary servitude remain, it is as *criminal punishment*, when prisoners must work as a condition of their sentence. (The more onerous forms of this, like chain gangs, no longer exist. Now prisoners make license plates, work in machine shops, or tend gardens.) But work as punishment is not at all equivalent, despite what Ali implies, to what ISIS is doing to Yazidi women. Her bringing up the very strict 13th Amendment, which basically outlawed all slavery of non-convicts, is meant to deflect attention from ISIS's sex slavery.

I have to say that I find Ali's argument truly revolting - not just because it's intellectually weak and actually deceptive, but because it debases the entire realm of university scholarship of which I'm a member. When I see pieces like hers - lame apologetics that are meant from the outset to reinforce an opinion already held - I thank Ceiling Cat that I am a scientist: a member of the guild in which using your scholarship to reinforce emotional commitments is considered a sin.

¹⁶ <http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/document.html?doc=9&title.raw=13th+Amendment+to+the+U.S.+Constitution%3A+Abolition+of+Slavery>