



THE SEXUAL JIHAD

The Global Rise of Sexual and Religious Radicalism

Stephen K. Baskerville



ABSTRACT

Since 1989, the two most dynamic ideological trends in global politics have been religious radicalism, especially Islamist, and sexual radicalism, both feminist and homosexualist. Both have roots in older socialist/Communist ideologies and likewise reject traditional Western Christian values and promise sweeping social transformation. Both make regulating sexual behavior a high priority. Though mutually incompatible in content, both aspire to political power at the expense of the traditional Christian West and by controlling the terms of sexuality. Occasionally, they also make common cause. Yet political radicalism originated in the West, arguably in English Puritanism, where similarities are seen with today's Islamism, including the latter's "puritanical" sexual morality and the alleged "patriarchal" quality of both movements. Yet not all forms of religious radicalism regulate sexuality in the same way. Puritanism led to stability, freedom, and prosperity. Islamism (so far) has led only to instability, stagnation, and terror. More research is needed into both the theology and the practical politics to explain why.

Keywords: Islamism, feminism, puritanism, religious radicalism, sexual radicalism, family

THE ARGUMENT

Since the collapse of European Communism in 1989-91, two claimants have emerged to inherit the leadership of transnational ideology.¹ Both have roots in the broad socialist-communist ideology that dominated the twentieth century. But since the effective discrediting of that system, these new claimants have, between them, dramatically altered the ideological polarity of global politics on a scale comparable to what socialism achieved in its day. Yet where socialism based its grievances on social and economic relations, its successor ideologies derive their complaints from relations of sexuality.

Over the last four decades, the global political agenda has increasingly come to be dominated by the politics of sex.² The most obvious driver is feminism along with a recently assertive homosexual politics. Its less obvious rival is no less determined to ground its claims to power on control of sexuality: radical Islamism. These two ideological systems are usually seen as antagonists, with programs and agendas whose theoretical incompatibility needs no description. Yet they might more instructively be seen as rivals. For all their obvious differences, they share an aspiration to political power based on their claims to control and change the terms of sexual relations, along with connected issues such as the family and children.

Moreover, both have a common opponent (though also some common historical roots) in a third model that has also based its claims to legitimacy, in part, on its ability to manage the terms of sexuality, children, and the family. This is the traditionally Christian West and the increasingly Christian South³.

¹ For comments and suggestions on earlier versions, the author would like to thank Katherine Gorka, Frans Veerman, and the members of the following conferences: Religion and Politics in the Globalization Era, Centre for Political Analysis, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 22-24 June 2012; Second International Congress on Science, Ethics, and Integrated Education, Sao Paulo, 6-8 December 2012; International Consultation on Religious Freedom Research, International Institute for Religious Freedom, Istanbul, 16-18 March 2013; Conference of the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture (ASREC), Washington, 11-14 April 2013.

² Newsweek magazine cover: <http://www.rojaksite.com/newsweek-politics-of-sex/>.

³ Christian global South (formally known as the Third World).

These three models offer today's dominant choices for ordering the relations between men and women, marriage, family structure, and children. And each carries profound and very different implications for both the secular domestic political order and the alignment of global politics.

THE NEW SEXUAL MILITANCY

The obvious pioneers of sexual politics are the feminists and their recent allies in the homosexual rights movement. The Sexual "Revolution" has now moved far beyond feminist claims to equal rights or homosexual demands to be left alone and now encompasses a vast array of demands that have already achieved far-reaching changes in Western societies and beyond: including the terms of marriage, the family, demography, the economy, international relations, and the very nature and purpose of civil government.

What some call "sexualityism"⁴ or "gender ideology," and what one sympathetic scholar terms "the ideology of the erotic,"⁵ has now positioned itself on the vanguard of left-wing politics." There is much more to the new sexual politics than sexual freedom. Demands for "power" and "empowerment" indicate that what has evolved is a true and complete ideology involving extensive political aspirations. It replaces the old socialistic battle cry of "social justice" with demands for what is now being called "erotic justice."⁶ Richard Parker explains how effectively this new ideology operates to overturn social and political hierarchies, offend traditional sensibilities, and promote rebellion as a virtue for its own sake:

The erotic...is linked to the structures of power...The relationship between power and eroticism can only be understood...by situating the erotic...as a kind of alternative to these other systems...the erotic offers an anarchic alternative to the established order of the sexual universe: an alternative in which the only absolute rule is the transgression of prohibitions...Transgressing the established order of daily life...even the structures of

⁴ Helen Alvare, "The White House and Sexualityism," *Public Discourse*, 16 July 2012, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2012/07/5757/>.

⁵ Richard Parker, *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), p. 111.

⁶ Sonia Corrêa, Rosalind Petchesky, and Richard Parker, *Sexuality, Health, and Human Rights* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 4-5.

power can themselves be eroticized within this frame of reference... No less than same-sex interactions, extramarital affairs, masturbation, or anal intercourse...destroy the hierarchical values of the everyday world...The workings of power must be understood through the cultural forms and meanings of the erotic, and the symbolism of the erotic must be interpreted through the structures of power and its capacity to transform them.⁷

Globally and especially in the democracies, the dominance of sexual ideology is unrivalled at the cutting edge of today's left. Virtually every item on the Western public agenda is now feminized or sexualized and cast in terms of its impact on women or "women and children" or a broader "gender identity": health, welfare, immigration, taxation, the environment, development, military power – all, we are told, require special considerations for women, children, or "sexual minorities." Economic crises are addressed according to their allegedly special impact on women. War and foreign policy are transformed by debates about women and homosexuals in the military and in other societies. The environment is a women's issue, we are told, and so is climate change.⁸

One indicator is the outpouring of triumphalist articles in prestigious journals gloating over the new feminine power: In *Foreign Policy*, Reihan Salam announces "The Death of Macho" and the destruction of "the macho men's club." In "A Woman's World," on the cover of the *Wilson Quarterly*, Sara Sklaroff proclaims that "women are taking over." In "The End of Men" on the *Atlantic Monthly* cover, Hanna Rosin describes "how women are taking control of everything." Revealingly, none of these authors or journals apparently feels any need to justify this trend, approach it with any measure of critical or skeptical detachment, or entertain even the possibility that it may entail any negative features or injustices of its own.

Domestically, the dominance of sexual ideology over left-wing politics is seen in the sexualisation of the welfare state. Originally justified on quasi-socialistic principles as a measure to alleviate working class poverty and insecurity, continued welfare expansion today is justified instead mostly on feminist principles, citing the "feminization of poverty" and the poverty

⁷ Parker, *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions*, 151-152.

⁸ Stephen Baskerville, *The New Politics of Sex: The Sexual Revolution, Civil Liberties, and the Growth of Governmental Power* (Kettering, Ohio: Angelico Press, 2017).

specifically of children. Welfare officials themselves are overwhelmingly women, and the combination of dispensers and recipients constitutes a formidable political pressure group. This in fact was the core constituency of former American President Barack Obama, presidential aspirant Hillary Clinton, former French President Francois Hollande, and other left-leaning governments, such governments in Spain, Brazil, and Chile. Even as its costs strain government budgets and topple prime ministers, welfare spending continues to increase, with angry protesters (mostly female and adolescent) in Athens, London, Manchester, and elsewhere striking fear into any politician who contemplates substantial spending reductions.

In the United States, welfarist ideology was expanded to government healthcare, and the sexual left became its principal lobby.⁹ Its formidable power extends to coercive measures involving both finances and religion – significantly over matters like abortion and contraception that have less to do with health than with sexuality. Under Obamacare, for the first time, American citizens were required to buy someone’s product as a condition for living in their own country and overriding their religious or political convictions.

This points to another consequence of sexual ideology: the impact on religious liberty. Virtually every controversy involving religious freedom in the West now proceeds from demands for sexual freedom:¹⁰ preachers are arrested for criticizing homosexuality; town clerks and registrars have been fired and even arrested for refusing to officiate same-sex marriages; bed-and-breakfast owners are sued for refusing to accommodate cohabiting homosexuals; Catholic adoption agencies have been closed for refusing to place children with same-sex couples; Christian firemen are required to participate in political demonstrations that mock their religion and police to display political symbols in police stations; homeschoolers have lost their children to school authorities implementing an increasingly sexualized curriculum;¹¹ proposed European

⁹ *Unmarried Women On Health Care: Unmarried Women Driving Change on Leading Domestic Issue*, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner internet site:

http://www.greenbergresearch.com/articles/2066/3853_wvvv%20_health%20care%20memo_%200807m9_FL_NAL_.pdf, 8 August 2007.

¹⁰ Stephen Baskerville, “The Sexual Agenda and Religious Freedom,” *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2011).

¹¹ Mike Donnelly, “Religious Freedom in Education,” *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2011).

Union directives would allow private citizens to be sued for expressing beliefs about sexual issues.¹²

Sexual politics has fundamentally transformed the very nature and purpose of civil government. The most basic state functions – external defense, border security, and criminal justice – have been altered, with governments relinquishing their traditional functions and increasingly acquiring new ones: care of children and the aged, education, medical care. It is tempting to point out that the traditional functions being surrendered by the state are masculine, whereas the new government roles are traditionally feminine. Here as elsewhere, gender roles are not eliminated but politicized. The face of the modern state is less the male soldier or policeman and more the female social worker and civil servant. And yet critically, the new feminized functionaries are no less police than were the previous male ones. They simply do not wear uniforms, and they are not restrained as were traditional police from the power to exercise coercive jurisdiction over the private lives of non-criminal citizens.

Correspondingly, the basic internal state function – criminal justice – has also been dramatically redefined. On the one hand, the criminal justice system has long been changing in ways that are seen as more humane and “caring,” with lighter sentences, alternatives to incarceration, and special procedures for youth and others deemed not fully responsible for their actions. Yet alongside this apparent humanization of criminal justice and hardly noticed, have emerged new sexual crimes defined by the new sexual gendarmerie.

Since the inception of their revolution sexual militants have been creating a vast panoply of new crimes and expanded redefinitions of existing crimes – all involving sexuality: “rape” (substantially redefined), “sexual assault,” “sexual harassment,” “domestic violence,” “stalking,” “bullying,” “child abuse,” “sex trafficking,” and more. These new crimes often bear little resemblance to what is suggested by the terminology. Yet they have politicized law enforcement and criminal justice, rendered both criminal and civil law vague and subjective, by-passed and eroded due process protections, and criminalized and incarcerated large numbers of men and

¹² Paul Coleman and Roger Kiska, “The Proposed EU ‘Equal Treatment’ Directive,” *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2012).

some women who had no knowledge that they were committing a crime.¹³ Recent accusations of various and ill-defined forms of sexual “misconduct” against major figures in the culture and politics are only the latest and most visible manifestations, elevated to media prominence, of a trend that has been widespread for years beneath the media radar screen and where the targets have overwhelmingly been private individuals.¹⁴

THE SEXUAL JIHAD

This paradoxical combination of sexual freedom and sexual punishment resembles radical ideologies of the past. Though often containing elements of sexual libertinism, successful political ideologies have usually been characterized by a certain sexual puritanism. This is often but not necessarily religious. “Ironically, those countries which rejected religion in the name of Communism tended to adopt their own version of sexual puritanism, which often matched those of the religions they assailed,” Dennis Altman observes.¹⁵ The most effective radical organizers have sought to limit sexual license, and a major achievement of Lenin and Bolshevism was to discipline the cadres’ “infantile” bohemianism by channeling the libido into party activity. “Drown your sexual energy in public work,” urged Nicolai Semashko, the first People’s Commissar for Health. “If you want to solve the sexual problem, be a public worker.”¹⁶ When bohemianism crept back into early Soviet family policy in the form of easy divorce laws, it caused widespread social havoc and had to be abandoned.¹⁷

But communist and other secular ideologies have proven far less effective in repressing sexual license than has radical religion. This may explain why Leninist-Maoist ideologies, that

¹³ Baskerville, *New Politics of Sex*, ch. 3; Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 115-116.

¹⁴ Stephen Baskerville, “The Sexual Revolution Turns Ugly,” *Crisis*, 16 November 2017, <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2017/sexual-revolution-turns-ugly>

¹⁵ Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 6.

¹⁶ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 188.

¹⁷ The feminist legislation of the Bolsheviks was extensive, though no more so than what Western governments have enacted today. “This was Western feminism’s maximum program,” writes Eley (*ibid.*). The result was chaos, and the program was repealed. See “The Russian Effort to Abolish Marriage,” by “a woman resident in Russia,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 1 July 1926 (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1926/07/the-russian-effort-to-abolish-marriage/306295/>).

dominated post-war movements of “national liberation” in the global South have given way to radical Islamism (plus other forms of radical religion such as Hindutva and radicalized Buddhism, as well as a Christian revival).¹⁸ Here too the dominant political motif is sexual.

Sexuality is not peripheral in the agendas of these movements. “The centrality of gender relations in the political ideology of Islam,” in the words of Parvin Paidar, is now widely acknowledged by scholars.¹⁹ Whatever the various resentments fueling Islamist activism, the Islamist response largely distills down into sexual regulation. Radical Muslims understand that controlling sex and claiming sexual purity translate into political power. “The issue of women is not marginal,” write Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit; “it lies at the heart of Islamic [radicalism].”²⁰ The relationship between sexual discipline and civic freedom, at one time well understood in the West (as we shall see), is now largely forgotten in that culture. But Islamists today understand it keenly. “The *hejab* has been identified by the [Iranian] regime as the very cornerstone of its revolution,” notes Haideh Moghissi. “It is described as basic to Islamic ideology and...seen by them as denoting deliverance from the yoke of imperialism ‘and as representing’ a symbol of liberation and resistance to capitalism and of revolutionary aspirations.”²¹

In a popular work, Danesh D’Souza has argued that Muslim fear and hatred of the West proceeds from a perception of Western sexual depravity: “The main focus of Islamic disgust [over Abu Ghraib] was what Muslims perceived as extreme sexual perversion.” In contrast to Western liberal sensibilities, Muslim revulsion over the highly publicized mistreatment of prisoners proceeded not from its brutality but from its debauchery. “What that female American soldier in uniform did to the Arab man, strip him of his manhood and pull him on a leash,” comments one Muslim, “this is what America wants to do to the Muslim world.” Osama bin

¹⁸ Michael Walzer, *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

¹⁹ Quoted in Masoud Kazemzadeh, *Islamic Fundamentalism, Feminism, and Gender Inequality in Iran Under Khomeini* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2002), p. 4.

²⁰ Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin, 2004). The online version of this book does not appear to have page numbers.

²¹ Haideh Moghissi, ed., *Women and Islam* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 77-78.

Laden is likewise quoted as saying that “They want to skin us from our manhood.” Wounded “manhood” is a theme in the literature of Hindutva and political Buddhism and one to which we will return.

D’Souza’s suggestion that Western sexual dissipation inflames Muslim hostility and plays into the hands of Islamist radicals cannot be lightly dismissed. “The West is...a society in which the number of illegitimate children approaches and sometimes surpasses the number of children from permitted unions,” declares one radical sheikh, accurately. Such perceptions are hardly hyperbole; they touch on the most acute social crisis in the West today, where the deterioration of marriage and the family and the proliferation of single-parent homes is a major source of social anomie and economic insolvency. “The most basic right of a child is to have two parents, and this right is taken away from nearly half of the children in Western society,” writes one Muslim scholar.²² The Ayatollah Mottahari describes the western welfare state and divorce machinery, likewise with some accuracy:

The replacement of the father by the government, which is the current trend in the West, will...alter the very nature of motherhood from an emotional tie into a form of waged employment with money as an intermediary between mother and her love; motherhood then is no longer a bond, but a paid employment. It is obvious that this process would lead to the destruction of the family.²³

At the same time, Islamism is far from a simple return to family values. D’Souza draws his evidence not from some Islamic version of Focus on the Family but from leading purveyors of Islamist political terror, such as Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden. This suggests that, while perceived Western sexual decadence does indeed fuel support for Islamic terror, Islamists have moved far beyond the passive defense of traditional morality to create a new and fanatical ideology that, far from seeking to preserve the *status quo*, aims to alter it radically.

²² Danesh D’Souza, *The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pp. 150, 152, 153.

²³ Quoted in Abida Samiuddin, “Iranian Women and their Support for Islam,” in *Muslim Feminist and Feminist Movement: Middle East – Asia*, vol. 1, ed. Abida Samiuddin and R. Khanam (Delhi: Global Vision, 2002), p. 312.

The resentments fueling Islamist militancy combine grievances over sexual decadence we traditionally associate with the right with those previously championed by the radical left such as “imperialism” and “capitalism”. The ideology freely borrows from its kindred Western ideologies, revolutionary fascism and Marxism – and indeed, unlikely as it may seem, even feminism. “While steeped in Islamic myth and forms, the events of 1979 represented first and foremost a political revolution,” writes a scholar, referring to Islamism’s most sophisticated political creation so far, in Iran:

Khomeini’s revolutionary role models were secular and, for the most part, Western. During the revolution and since, revolutionary political goals have always taken precedence over religious goals. ... Iranian law contains many non-Islamic concepts: legal (if not yet actual) *equality between the sexes concerning property, employment, and family rights...*²⁴

And the empathy is mutual. Perplexing to many is the affinity the Western left apparently feels with radical Islamism. “It is striking,” notes the late Fred Halliday of the “politically articulated accommodation...between Islamism as a political force and many groups of the left.”²⁵ Strikingly, even feminism manages to make its peace with radical Islam.²⁶

Indeed, the central paradox to be explained is why, if Islamism oppresses women, does it attract such large numbers of them. “Many observers have wondered why women in the hundreds of thousands, including educated women, actively supported a movement which appeared to curtail their rights.”²⁷ That they in fact did and do so is undeniable, especially (but not only) in the complex circumstances of the Iranian Revolution. “A distinctive feature of the Iranian Revolution was the participation of large groups of women,” writes a feminist scholar.²⁸ “Women have acquired a very prominent position in the ideology as well as practice of the

²⁴ Caroline Ziemke, “The National Myth and Strategic Personality of Iran: A Counterproliferation Perspective,” in *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation, US Interests, and World Order*, ed. Victor A. Utgoff (Cambridge, Mass.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2000), pp. 98-99 (emphasis added).

²⁵ Patrick Sookhdeo, *Global Jihad* (McLean, Virginia: Isaac, 2007), pp. 28-29.

²⁶ Kay S. Hymowitz, “Why Feminism is AWOL on Islam,” *City Journal*, Winter 2003.

²⁷ Ruth Roded, *Women in Islam and the Middle East* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1999), p. 255.

²⁸ Anne Betteridge, “To Veil or Not to Veil: A Matter of Protest or Policy” in *Women and Revolution in Iran*, ed. Guity Nashat (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 109.

Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic.” This is often explained away as part of the general opposition to the Shah rather than enthusiasm for a specifically Islamist regime, but this is much too easy. “In the case of women...the most militant advocates of Islamisation are among the highly educated graduates of universities.”²⁹ These were consciously dedicated Islamist women, attired decidedly in veils, and often armed. “Observers have all noted the presence and activism of women in the Islamist movement,” writes Olivier Roy; “recall the demonstrations of armed and veiled women in Iran.”³⁰

Political correctness notwithstanding, these women are not coerced into this involvement. They are operatives in a movement consciously determined to acquire political power, and they understand very well that claiming sexual purity is the most effective means of acquiring it.

Even today, as young women from Europe and America enlist in the ranks of the fanatical Islamic State, it is clear that they do so because they seek both power for themselves and to attach themselves to powerful men (thus exploiting, as feminism itself does, both male and female forms of power). Female recruits supervise the morals brigades, policing the public sexual morality of the occupied territories. “Al-Khanssaa patrols walk the streets of Raqqa seeking out inappropriate mixing of the sexes and anyone engaging in Western culture,” according to one scholar.

And it is the women fleeing Western decadence who are the most zealous. “The British women are being given key roles in the brigade because they are considered by ISIL commanders to be the most committed of the foreign female jihadis to the cause,” according to the *Daily Telegraph*, quoting Melanie Smith of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King’s College, London: “The British women are some of the most zealous in imposing the IS laws in the region.” But it is not just that they want power for themselves; they also want to be the brides of powerful men:

²⁹ Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State, and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,” in *Women, Islam, and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 63–64.

³⁰ Olivier Roy, *Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 59.

Many of the women heading for Syria had gone there to find a husband among the jihadi fighters...

Miss Smith says the jihadi social media is “buzzing” with marriage proposals, and many of the fighters have taken several wives...

Miss Smith said a famous Dutch jihadi, known as Yilmaz, who married this week has “broken the hearts” of scores of Western Muslim women who have all made marriage proposals in the last few months.

A monitor of Yilmaz’s internet accounts show [sic] that he received an astonishing 10,000 marriage requests during his time as a jihadi fighter up until his marriage.

Miss Smith said: “It is clear that some of these women who have been travelling to Syria have since married jihadists and foreign fighters.” Some, said Miss Smith, want to marry a martyr.³¹

Nina Shea comments: “She is no innocent, duped into a life of terror, or pushover for male domination,” she writes of one of the leading morals policewomen. “She is living refutation of the theory that female empowerment alone is the path to Islamic moderation, as the State Department has long maintained. . . . For too long, American forces seemed to underestimate such women, taking them to be simply victims within a large undifferentiated class of oppressed women.”³²

As often, both sides of the dynamic involve power, both directly for themselves and indirectly through new husbands. Thus they have the advantages of all worlds: exercising power as both inflictors and victims. The power dynamic and the dilemma it poses for Western liberalism is embodied in the Dutch woman who joined jihadists because she wanted to escape Western androgyny and marry a “real man”^{33, 34} The headline is revealing of Western moral and

³¹ *Daily Telegraph*, “British Female Jihadis Sign Up to the Islamic State’s All-Women Police Force,” 7 September 2014 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11079386/British-female-jihadis-sign-up-to-the-Islamic-States-all-women-police-force.html>).

³² Nina Shea, “Equal Opportunity Terrorism,” *The Weekly Standard*, 19 October 2015 (http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/equal-opportunity-terrorism_1042864.html).

³³ *Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 2013 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11247941/Dutch-jihadi-bride-Is-she-a-victim-or-a-suspect.html>).

legal confusion: “Dutch jihadi bride: ‘Is she a victim or a suspect?’”

RELIGIOUS RADICALISM IN THE WEST

The West also has a rich experience of grappling with not only sexual issues but also their larger political implications, and in the process it created its own radical religious movements with profound consequences for modern history. Some now suggest that this resembles today’s Islamist militancy. The most successful practitioners of the principle of repressing sexual license and harnessing sexual energy in the service of civic freedom – whose influence has passed directly to our own political culture – were, as their name suggests, the Puritans.

The popular understanding of “Puritan” as abstinence from pleasure, including sexual pleasure, may indeed be that movement’s most significant legacy (and ironically, the one least examined by scholars).³⁵ In both England and New England, campaigns against personal vice – not only sexual license, but swearing, drinking, gambling, blood sports, and other popular indulgences – involved much more than “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy,” in the famous words of H.L. Mencken. Very decided public aims lay behind these prohibitions: to create virtuous citizens. Puritanism might thus be seen as a massive program to implement what has since become the cliché that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance.³⁶ The Puritans saw freedom as beyond the reach of people who wallowed in indulgence and licentiousness. Self-government required self-control. “There is a service which is freedom, the service of Christ; and there is a freedom which is servitude, freedom to sin,” one minister told the House of Commons during the English Revolution. “There is a liberty which is bondage and...a bondage which is liberty.”³⁷

Not accidentally, these puritans in the popular sense were also early modern Europe’s most sophisticated political activists. Indeed, they have been plausibly credited with nothing less than

³⁴ For more on this, see the Conclusion.

³⁵ Stephen Baskerville, *Not Peace but a Sword: The Political Theology of the English Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1993; expanded edition, Wipf & Stock, forthcoming).

³⁶ Michael Walzer, “The Revolutionary Uses of Repression,” in *Essays in Theory and History*, ed. Melvin Richter (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970).

³⁷ Baskerville, *Not Peace but a Sword* (1993), p. 176.

“the origins of radical politics.”³⁸ Their drive for personal purity was writ large in a simultaneous campaign for ecclesiastical purification, and from there to advocacy for political reform. The Puritans developed an elaborate political theology with revolutionary implications.

The politics were played out in two events of inestimable importance for modern history: the colonization of what became the United States, whose strongly religious political culture – unique in the West today – is a direct legacy of Puritanism (and continues as a major player in today’s sexual politics); and the first of the great modern revolutions, the English Revolution of the 1640s, which set the pattern for others to come – including the American, French, and Russian revolutions, and even Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Both Puritan commonwealths did exhibit violent and theocratic tendencies, which renders comparisons with today’s Islamist theocracies at least superficially plausible. Yet the contrasts may be more instructive than the similarities. Theocratic campaigns were moderated by the dualisms that exist in Christianity but not in Islam and other religions: the “two kingdoms,” *regnum* and *sacerdotum*, church and state, sacred and secular, eternal and temporal. These dualisms recognized the legitimacy of secular institutions, allowing the lay leadership in the English Revolution to retain the upper hand and preventing the clergy or any particular denomination from dominating the state, while still serving as a watchdog on it.

Inseparable from this, the Puritans were obsessed with a connected matter of profound and continuing influence on today’s politics, producing early modern Europe’s most voluminous literature on the organization and operation of the family. This was hardly a quietist withdrawal from the public square into private life. On the contrary, the family was Puritanism’s institution for connecting sexuality and civic life. The Puritans considered the family a “little commonwealth,” where family members, especially children, were trained in the habits and techniques of citizenship.³⁹ Relevant here is that women were assigned essential responsibilities, and despite their modern image as champions of the “patriarchal” family, the Puritans attracted

³⁸ Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965).

³⁹ John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Stephen Baskerville, “The Family in Puritan Political Theology,” *Journal of Family History*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1993).

educated women in large numbers.⁴⁰ Like the church, of which is served as the lowest administrative unit, the family acted as a counterbalance and check to the state.

Puritanism is also renowned for promoting economic prosperity, supplying the evidence for the “Protestant ethic” thesis of Max Weber. Given that the family is also the most basic unit of economic production, one consequence is almost certainly the material prosperity of the West especially. This, as much or more than the Puritan soteriology where Weber and most of his followers principally identified it (though Weber himself did not ignore the family), is likely to be the basis of the Protestant ethic of conscientious work leading to widespread affluence.

ISLAM’S REFORMATION?

Some suggest that Muslim experience today parallels the West’s Puritan past. “Islamic fundamentalist sexual puritanism has more in common with seventeenth-century Christian Puritanism than with the sexual mores of either the Prophet Mohammad, Islam, historical Shiism or most Iranians,” insists Masoud Kazemzadeh.⁴¹ Even allowing for differences, if the West emerged from its own revolutionary wars of religion and religious intolerance as a free society and a global powerhouse, perhaps similar potential exists in Islam? Hypothesizing further, if Western freedom and prosperity came not despite Puritan sexual discipline but because of it, perhaps radical Islam may do likewise?

Yet it does not necessarily follow that all forms of religious radicalism are equally effective in processing the rage and resentment that fuels them. In this case, the differences could hardly be more striking. (And what follows are preliminary suggestions on which more research from scholars qualified in Islam is needed.)

⁴⁰ See for example Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads: The Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the Outbreak of the English Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁴¹ Masoud Kazemzadeh, *Islamic Fundamentalism, Feminism, and Gender Inequality in Iran Under Khomeini* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002), 97. But to say (p. 7) that “the puritanism of contemporary Islamic fundamentalists has more in common with the puritanism of contemporary Christian fundamentalists and Jewish fundamentalists than with the ethos of original Islam” is nonsense. Neither Christian nor Jewish “fundamentalists” are advocating, let alone practicing, terror.

Islamism does not appear to have the tools to translate its resentments into political, social, and economic modernity. Rather than producing the freedom, stability, and prosperity for which the Puritans are credited, radical Islamism (thus far) leads to continued rage and self-pity, along with their accompaniments of instability, stagnation, and terror.

Several apparent reasons are often cited: undiluted theocracy rather than separate spheres for church and state; the absence of an institutionalized and hierarchical church to serve as an alternative polity, check state power, and discipline its own members; no real concept of a “state” whose power can be defined and limited; theological legalism and obscurantism, rather than an ethic of renewal and forgiveness.⁴²

Whatever the explanatory value of these theological contrasts, they have counterparts in sexual morality. Indeed, the role of women has long distinguished sharply Islamic from Christian civilization. A Turkish envoy in Vienna in the seventeenth century (the apogee of Puritanism and political Calvinism) wrote of a “most extraordinary spectacle”: “In this country and in general in the lands of the unbelievers, women have the main say.” Bernard Lewis writes that for centuries, “The difference in the position of women was indeed one of the most striking contrasts between Christian and Muslim practice and is mentioned by almost all travelers in both directions.” Lewis himself describes the status of women as “probably the most profound single difference between the two civilizations.” Noting that “The social systems of the East and West are established on diametrically different principles,” the noted researcher Ruth Woodsmall believed that “The pivotal difference is the position of women.”⁴³

The moral discipline and self-repression Puritans saw as the precondition for freedom has become for Islamists simply sexual (and political) repression for its own sake, to the point of internal as well as external terror. In both instances, repression may be enforced by legal sanctions, but in Puritanism it began from an imperative for inner renewal. The individual’s internal renewal was then externalized in the communal church, which was described as a kind

⁴² Robert Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis* (Wilmington: ISI, 2011).

⁴³ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 66-67; Woodsmall quoted in Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*.

of extended family (the “bride of Christ”). Only from there, did it provide the drive for reform and for wielding power in the state. Legal enforcement of morality by the state machinery was usually the last resort, not the first impulse.

The Muslim family does not seem capable of channeling sexual energy into either economic prosperity or political freedom. Perhaps this is because there is no clearly defined state for it to exist in distinction to. Just as the mosque cannot counterbalance the state because neither is clearly defined or distinguished, neither can the family because there is no recognized duality of public and private.

Sublimating sexual energy for political purposes is clearly fundamental to radical Islam, and though similarities to Puritanism exist, the process appears to be very different. “In the Muslim order it is not necessary for the individual to eradicate his instincts or to control them for the sake of control itself, but he must use them according to the demands of religious law,” writes Fatima Mernissi. “Aggression and sexual desire, for example, if harnessed in the right direction, serve the purposes of the Muslim order.”⁴⁴ The great Ibn Khaldun wrote that “when he [Muhammad] censures the desires, he does not want them to be abolished altogether...He wants the desire to be used for permissible purposes to serve the public interests, so that man becomes an active servant of God who willingly obeys the divine commands.” Sensual delights on earth even offer a “foretaste” and therefore an incentive to delay gratification now in expectation of greater delights in heaven:

Sexual desire...is a foretaste of the delights secured for men in Paradise, because to make a promise to men of delights they have not tasted before would be ineffective.... Therefore the desire to reach the heavenly delight is so powerful that it helps men to persevere in pious activities in order to be admitted to heaven.⁴⁵

Muslim sexual asceticism also applies very differently for men and women. This is more complex than mere “sexism”; both the restrictions and rewards are geared to male functionality.

⁴⁴ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 27-28.

⁴⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

Sexual discipline clearly has a utilitarian value, but Islamist soteriology appears to make sex a reward for political and especially military service, demonstrating both the importance of the sexual-political trade-off and the one-dimensionality of the Islamist system for harnessing it. Heaven is likewise conceptualized in terms of male desire. “Paradise is full of sensual pleasures in which there are beautiful women, couches covered with brocades, plentiful wine and luscious fruits,” writes Patrick Sookhdeo. “Essentially it is the place where that which is forbidden on earth becomes allowed.”⁴⁶

Economically, the Islamist revolt against “imperialism and capitalism” so far produces only stagnation. Scholars seek in vain for any affinity of Muslim with Puritan asceticism. “The main historical examples in the central Islamic lands...[are] very far from the Puritan characterization,” writes Sami Zubaida. “There are no grounds...for attributing Puritanism (in Weber’s sense) to urban religious cultures in the Muslim world.” Further: “Whatever the rights and wrong of Weber’s characterization of his Protestants, his picture is certainly at great variance with all we know of the Muslim bourgeoisie in a variety of historical and geographical settings.”⁴⁷

Even Islamist sexual puritanism may result from a political calculation. “Looking at themselves through European eyes, these groups were anxious to banish all the negative stereotypes of lascivious sexuality, fanaticism, and superstition,” Zubaida argues. “Their construction of pure Islam, therefore, underplayed or omitted all the elements in the holy book and the traditions that endorsed or sanctioned such practices.”⁴⁸ In this sense then too, radical Islamism is a Western import. “Far from being the received Islam...it was a brand-new, invented Islam that...also incorporated, without acknowledgment, many ‘Western’ ideas – from the revolutionary puritanism of Robespierre to the ‘propaganda of the deed’ advocated by the Baader-Meinhof gang.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Patrick Sookhdeo, *Challenge of Islam* (McLean, Virginia: Isaac: 2008), pp. 30-31. See also “Sex Jihad Raging in Syria, Claims Minister,” *Daily Telegraphy*, 20 September 2013 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10322578/Sex-Jihad-raging-in-Syria-claims-minister.htm>).

⁴⁷ Sami Zubaida, *Beyond Islam: A New Understanding of the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 55, 57, 59.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁹ Malise Ruthven, “‘Born-again’ Muslims: Cultural Schizophrenia,” Open Democracy site, 10 September 2009,

Regarding Islamism as a political religion that borrows from secular ideology as needed, it is not surprising that it can engage in a paradoxical *pas de deux* with feminism⁵⁰. Ideologies seldom uphold fixed principles for long, and in the interminable debates about the compatibility of feminism and Islamism one might well detect echoes of the principle observed by Milovan Djilas during the Communism of the 1950s: “Power is the alpha and the omega of contemporary Communism,” he wrote. “Ideas, philosophical principles, and moral considerations, the nation and the people, their history... – all can be changed and sacrificed. But not power.”⁵¹ Islamists and feminists, like many of us, share the human craving for power. If it can be acquired through the veil, the veil will be worn and rationalized. If not, it will be discarded. But the central criterion is what maximizes power – or, in today’s formulation, “empowerment.”

Homosexual activists have adopted similar methods. It may be no accident that Islamists and homosexualists share an acute sensitivity to criticism, have devised parallel language to express parallel grievances against “Islamophobia” and “homophobia,” and demand government protection from “discrimination” and “harassment,” which is often defined as private individuals expressing their views or the tenets of their faith. These two groups alone successfully demand government-enforced immunity from criticism and punishment of those they deem guilty of “hate speech” for criticizing them or their political agenda.

http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-islamicworld/article_103.jsp.

⁵⁰ A particularly striking example of the disparity between the media depiction of women in Islamic societies as victims and the reality of their political power is provided by divorce law (as we have seen, a major component behind Islamic accusations of Western decadence). Many Islamic countries have already enacted what amounts to no-fault divorce, which confers enormous power on women. “Through talaq-i-tafweez the wife can initiate divorce without requiring any permission or agreement from the husband, and retains all her financial rights,” we are told. “She does not have to prove any grounds for divorce.” Most significantly, she also retains control and custody of children. Compared with this awesome power, regulations controlling women’s fashions are trivial. Muslim Marriage Contract website: http://muslimmarriagecontract.org/contract.html#delegation_of_divorce (accessed 16 December 2013). In the West too, divorce provides women with enormous political power below the media radar screen, including the silver bullet that cuts through religious principles. See Baskerville, *Taken Into Custody*. Puritanism may have played a role here too, though precisely what role is unclear. Most Puritan ministers violently opposed the (Puritan) poet John Milton’s proposal during the English Civil War to liberalize divorce laws. But perhaps the significance of the controversy is simply that it arose in the context of the English Revolution, when other radical ideas were in the air, as it was to do again in the American, French, Russian, and indeed, Iranian revolutions.

⁵¹ *The New Class* (New York: Praeger, 1958), p. 170.

CONCLUSION

Every society must control sex, and the most effective mechanism for controlling sex is religion. “Religion is central to sexual regulation in almost all societies,” writes Altman. “Indeed, it may well be that the primary social function of religion is to control sexuality.” This oversimplifies the matter, but the point is crucial.

Our modern illusion that we can simply ignore sexuality and leave it unregulated is highly naïve and leaves us vulnerable not only to social anomie, but also to those who will step in and regulate it for their own purposes. As we have seen, even the Soviets had to impose limits. “Whether it be Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, or Communism, religions tend to claim a particular right to regulate and restrict sexuality, a right which is often recognized by state authorities.”⁵²

In confronting this phenomenon, we dispense with traditional religious faith at the risk of incurring some unforeseen consequences. The alternative is already clear in our own, relatively stable societies, where the explosion of single-parent homes in a financially unsustainable welfare state threatens social stability, economic solvency, and even civic freedom.⁵³

When traditional religion is no longer able to effectively regulate sexual energy, radical political ideologies, including politicized religions – all armed with various political theologies and invariably backed by state functionaries – move in to fill the void. It is by no means fanciful to suggest that the decline of Christian faith in the West – along with the discrediting of secular ideologies that have dominated the West intellectually from the Enlightenment through the Cold War – has left a vacuum that is now being filled by radical Islam. To the liberal mind and its obsession with “progress,” Islamism appears to be a perplexing throwback to a “medieval” age. In fact, as our own history makes clear, it is very modern indeed: a radical ideology that harnesses sexual energy and channels it into political revolution.

⁵² Altman, *Global Sex*, p. 6.

⁵³ Stephen Baskerville, “From Welfare State to Police State,” *The Independent Review*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Winter 2008).

The fact that in the West sexual freedom has itself become politicized in an ideology of its own confirms that a major and complex ideological realignment in international politics has emerged as the direct result of the decline of Christian faith in the West and the consequent rise of politicized sexuality. In the global South too, it is very likely that the Christian revival now sweeping that region is, if not driven, at least occasioned as a response to sexual radicalism. “Most of the reasons for this involve disputes over gender and sexuality,” writes Philip Jenkins. “These have provided the defining issues that separate progressives and conservatives, ecclesiastical left and right.”⁵⁴ The same might be said of secular political left and right.

Given all this, how do we confront the Muslim world? Islamism is not like the economic ideology of Communism that can be discredited once and for all (apparently) by its demonstrable economic failure. Islam and the radical tendencies it sends forth will likely be with us for some time. We need to diffuse as well as defeat those tendencies.

It is no accident that Islamists claim jihad is a struggle for their “manhood” – a theme conspicuously absent in our evolving Western gender awareness paradigm but one that bears on both the military and sexual dimensions of the problem, and well beyond Islamism. (Similar themes can be found in the literature of Hindutva and politically aggressive Buddhism.) Any soldier will attest that it is always unwise to humiliate your enemy, and Islamism is an ideology that is quite purposefully designed to prompt an aggressive response to humiliation. Our aim must not be to destroy manhood, whether militarily or ideologically. For the sake of both civilizations, it may be a matter of finding the right way to accommodate it.

⁵⁴ Philip Jenkins, *The New Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 246.

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AUTHOR PROFILE



Stephen Baskerville is Professor of Government at Patrick Henry College and Research Fellow at the Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society and the Independent Institute. He holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and has taught at Howard University and Palacky University in the Czech Republic. His books include *The New Politics of Sex: The Sexual Revolution, Civil Liberties, and the Growth of Governmental Power* (Angelico, 2017), *Taken Into Custody: The War against Fathers, Marriage, and the Family* (Cumberland House, 2007), and *Not Peace But a Sword: The Political Theology of the English Revolution* (Routledge, 1993; expanded edition, Wipf & Stock, forthcoming). He is an advisor to the Men's Health Network, serves on the board of affiliates of Gendercide Watch, serves as contributing editor to the journal, *In Search of Fatherhood*, and is past managing editor of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom*.

Contact details: skbaskerville@phc.edu

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