

Rahaf Mohammed, Linda Sarsour, and the Question of Apostasy

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Rahaf Mohammed

The saga of the 18-year-old Saudi girl, Rahaf Mohammed, has ended. She is now safe in Canada, where she was granted asylum, and was even greeted at Toronto's airport on January 10 by Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland. She had been on the run from her family who, she said, might well kill her. Her crime? Daring to think for herself. At the age of 16, she had apparently thought for herself, and decided to leave Islam. She did not announce it to anyone in her family, but from that time forth she began to plan her escape from Saudi Arabia. She was in touch by email with another Saudi girl, also an apostate, who had managed to make it safely to the West, and from whose example Rahaf took heart. She initially set her sights on Australia.

When the family traveled to Kuwait on vacation in early January, she saw her chance. Once they were in Kuwait, she managed to evade the rest of her family and returned to the airport, where she took a flight to Thailand. At the Bangkok airport, she was met by Thai officials working with the local Saudis. They took away her passport, but did not take possession of Rahaf herself. She checked into an airport hotel, where she locked herself in a room. Thai guards stood outside. An official of Kuwait Airways came to plead with her, through a closed door, to go back to Kuwait. Nothing doing. Meanwhile, Rahaf Mohammed was contacting her friends on her phone, social media spread the story, and her plight was picked up by major news outlets, including the BBC and CNN.

The huge international outcry led Thai authorities to grant UNHCR (United Nations High Commission For Refugees) access to her "to assess her need for international refugee protection," the UNHCR said in a statement.

Phil Robertson, the deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch, said: "Today really was a good day for the cause of human rights around the world, with Rahaf's tremendous courage and resilience being met with a global surge of sympathy for her. It all came together to persuade Thailand to do the right thing."

Rahaf was still in Thailand when her father and brother arrived in Bangkok. She refused to see them; she said she was in "fear for her life." In any case, we can all imagine the kind of performance they would put on if she had finally consented to such a meeting. Aware that they were being filmed, the father would no doubt have promised, in the nicest possible way, not to harm her in the least "if only you come home now, my daughter, and stop making a spectacle that is hurting our family and our country." His wary daughter didn't give him that chance.

Rahaf's public plea for asylum expanded to include Canada, the

U.S., and the United Kingdom, as well as Australia. Canada was the first to respond, and now she is safe in Toronto.

It's a very important case. Thanks to Rahaf Mohammed, the world has been given a good look at several aspects of Islam that deserve to be held up for inspection.

First, there is the demonstration that despite Qur'an 2:256, a favorite verse for Islamic apologists that says "there is no compulsion in religion," the example of Rahaf Mohammed shows that there most certainly is "compulsion" in the religion of Islam. The threat of death for apostasy, which Rahaf Mohammed clearly fears, constitutes all the "compulsion" any Muslim needs to stay within the faith. As for non-Muslims, it is true that People of the Book, ahl al-kitab – Jews, Christians, and Sabians – are permitted to remain alive, and even to practice their religions, but they can do so only as "dhimmis," tolerated as long as they fulfill a long list of onerous and humiliating conditions, of which the most important is the Jizyah tax. And that explains why millions of non-Muslims have, over the centuries, converted to Islam, because they knew it was the only way to escape from the conditions imposed on them as dhimmis. That need to escape dhimmi status constitutes another kind of "compulsion in religion."

Second, there is the treatment of this 18-year-old girl by her devout Muslim family, which has given the world's Infidels a vivid idea of Muslim family relations, with a despotic father who exercises total control over his children, and where a brother can similarly act as an "enforcer" for a disobedient sister. For having her hair cut in a way her family did not approve – was it merely a matter of taste, or was it deemed un-Islamic? – Rahaf was locked in her room for six months. This is one example her own story has brought to the world's attention, demonstrating the kind of power wielded by Muslim males over an errant female family member. It's a horrifying picture.

91% of the honor killings in the world are committed by Muslims. This is, according to the Wikipedia definition, the “murder of a member of a family, due to the perpetrators’ belief that the victim has brought shame or dishonor upon the family, or has violated the principles of a community or a religion, usually for reasons such as divorcing or separating from their spouse, refusing to enter an arranged marriage, being in a relationship that is disapproved by their family, having sex outside marriage, becoming the victim of rape, dressing in ways which are deemed inappropriate, engaging in non-heterosexual relations or renouncing a faith.”

Rahaf Mohammed’s fear of being murdered by her family in such an “honor killing” was not farfetched. But in Thailand she had become a cause celebre, and had she been forced back to Saudi Arabia, it would have been much harder for the family to punish her in such a manner.

One hopes that that stout defender of women’s rights, Ms. Linda Sarsour, who has managed to present herself as an uber-feminist, and “leader” of the Women’s March, even as she defends that most misogynistic of faiths, Islam, will be asked her views on Rahaf Mohammed. Did she find the girl’s family outrageous for their having locked her in her room for six months as punishment for a haircut? That one should be easy for Linda Sarsour. Of course she does. But she has been mostly [defensive about Saudi Arabia](#). She has repeatedly tweeted praise of the Kingdom, for example, of its offering 10 months paid maternity leave, as if that should end all criticism of the Saudi treatment of women. She attacks those who think Saudi women should be allowed to choose how to dress – i.e., whether to cover or not, and if so, by how much – by tweeting that it’s a trivial social problem. She’s defended Sharia law – ignoring its severe punishments, for example, for all kinds of sexual behavior, and its unequal treatment of women (e.g., in inheritance laws and testimony in court) – by exclaiming, again deflecting attention from the real issue, “wouldn’t it

be great” if all interest payments were abolished as under Sharia. In reply to criticism of the condition of women in Saudi Arabia, she answers that “there are women in the Saudi parliament,” as if that were a suitable defense. You can find more on her defense of Saudi Arabia here.

And what does Linda Sarsour say about those many Muslims, including Rahaf’s family, who think apostates from Islam should be killed? If she denounces that view, she would be denouncing a belief that is central to Islam. As stated by Muhammad in a hadith (Al-Bukhari 9:57): “Whoever changes his Islamic religion, kill him.” Will Linda Sarsour take issue with Muhammad? Or if asked to comment on Rahaf’s case, will she instead meretriciously offer, as I suspect, something to deflect attention such as “look, this girl was trying to get asylum, so she makes all kinds of wild charges about death threats and so on. I’m not surprised. And her little ploy worked – she’s now in Canada.”

By her own brave defiance both of her family and of Islam itself, Rahaf Mohammed has helped bring the subject of how Muslims treat apostates to the world’s attention. Many who knew nothing about how severely those who leave the faith can be punished will have learned, through Rahaf’s own story, of the threats of death she reasonably feared and, one hopes, of the hadith which supports that punishment, in which Muhammad gives his terrifying command to “kill [anyone] who changes his Islamic religion.” That ought to startle a good many people, who until now will not have known about the punishment for apostates from Islam. Her case will ideally lead to widespread discussion of this murderous hadith, which Muslims cannot ever disavow and Infidels cannot ever accept. It will be fascinating, too, to see how Muslim apologists will attempt, as they must, to defend that punishment. For without such a threat, how many millions or tens of millions of “cultural” Muslims, or Muslim-For-Identification-Purposes-Only Muslims, would leave Islam?

Meanwhile, let's ask Linda Sarsour, our Muslim Feminist Misogynist, if she is delighted that Rahaf's story has a happy outcome and if she thinks we should all celebrate her bravery. Or does she think that girl should have returned dutifully to her family in Saudi Arabia, a country which Linda Sarsour has for so long defended? Complicating matters for Sarsour, the Saudis, apparently ungrateful for her efforts on their behalf, began in December to assail her for having her roots in the Muslim Brotherhood. What's poor Linda Sarsour to do – keep defending the Saudis, or deepen the rift not of her making?

And let's all keep Linda Sarsour in our sights, by asking her, on every conceivable occasion and on every conceivable platform: Do you agree, Linda, that those who leave Islam should be killed? Or punished in any way? Yes or no? How many ways can even Linda Sarsour possibly squirm out of answering that?

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