

# THE HYPOCRISY OF “NEWLY MINTED FEMINISTS”... AND DAVID HOROWITZ’ DANGEROUS AGENDA

BY T. REDTREE (REVOLUTION # 105, OCTOBER 21, 2007)

The people putting on “Islamofascism Awareness Week”—the October 22–26 series of events at universities and colleges purporting to oppose “Islamofascism” and to develop support for the “war on terror”—pose as champions of the rights of women. And so, at a time when the Supreme Court has thrown the right to abortion into question, when the operatives of the Bush regime have brought birth control increasingly under fire, when violence against women in this country continues and intensifies with vengeance, and when the culture is saturated with ritual shamings of women who “go bad”. . . Horowitz and his allies have proclaimed their intent to hold sit-ins at Women’s Studies Departments, “designed to protest the absence of courses that focus on Islamic gynophobia,” in order to coerce them into signing the statement “Calling on Feminists to End Their Silence on the Oppression of Women in Islam”!

The hypocrisy of these newly minted feminists is stunning. But behind the hypocrisy lies an ugly and dangerous agenda. Horowitz is seizing on the truth of the real oppression of women in countries ruled by Islamic fundamentalists in the service of a very big lie. There is a way to oppose this oppression—but it is not by enlisting in Horowitz’s crusade. Indeed, if you really do oppose the oppression of women—in Islamic fundamentalist countries and movements and on the rest of the planet as well—opposing Horowitz’s “week” is the most important thing you can do right now.

## “Islamofascism Awareness Week”

Horowitz has manipulated and thieved language and tactics from the 1960s to make it look like campus brownshirts are the new wave of student activism—using tactics like sit-ins and protests at Women’s Studies Departments “with the goal of encouraging them to provide course offerings on the abuse of women in Islam.” The scholarship and teaching currently going on in Women’s studies is dismissed as “trivial” or “imagined” and criticized for the “numerous hours. . . spent. . . dissecting the reasons for the ‘wage gap’ in America, violence against women and the ‘privileges’ accorded Caucasian males. But courses on the plight of women in Islamic regimes are strangely absent.” (Sara Dogan—Frontpage, 10/9/07)

Phyllis Chesler and Robert Spensor have written a pamphlet for the week titled *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam*, which marshals partial truths about the oppression of women in the service of a gigantic lie—one that has been told by colonial powers since the 19th century—and was trotted out most recently in service of launching the opening act in the war on terror in Afghanistan. “We’re here to save the women! We’re ready to fight the ‘war on terror’ not to extend the violence of empire but to protect the weaker sex!” And now the same war propaganda is being drummed up all over again, to reinforce this “war on terror” and to mount support and consent for attacking Iran.

Chesler and Spensor also exhibit a xenophobic worldview that includes passages that warn of the danger of allowing Islamic people to immigrate—spreading the contagion of Islamic backwardness and terrorism into European and American society. Their treatment of the whole subject conjures up the kind of fear and prejudice that creates an atmosphere where rendition, detention, and torture for “your safety” are tolerated. And their rhetoric is an echo of the war propaganda from World War 2—where stereotypes of “inscrutable” Japanese whose “minds were 2000 years behind” were created to train the public to go along with putting people into internment camps.

## A Cautionary Tale—Afghanistan and Iraq

In this land of short attention spans, let’s recall the justifications for war against Afghanistan. Before that war, TV specials about the plight of women forced under the burkah were brought into millions of living rooms—people sympathized and hearts went out to the women living under the Taliban. Young men and women signed up with the U.S. military to fight. The women’s movement was actively courted and put on display to prove the political will and broad sentiment in favor of bombing and invasion.

Susan Faludi’s new book, *The Terror Dream—Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*, documents the whole thing in detail. “After months of being snubbed, the Feminist Majority, which had been trying to call attention to the Taliban’s abuse of women since 1996, found itself in the astonishing position of playing belle at the capitol ball.... The White House (which had just abolished the office of women’s initiatives) began contacting women’s rights organizations and asking them to seek ‘common ground’ with the administration that had iced them since its inception.”

Faludi documents how feminist leaders were invited to brief Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and others. Congress held hearings on the status of women in Afghanistan. Bush himself pronounced to an audience of women’s rights activists that “the central goal of the terrorists is the brutal oppression of women,” and Colin Powell solemnly

stated that the “rights of women will not be negotiable” as the State Department issued a “Report on the Taliban’s War against Women.” And then it stopped. Barely two weeks after the invasion, when questioned about the status of women’s rights, the State Department said it “had other priorities.”

Today Afghanistan has a parliament full of Islamic fundamentalists and warlords and the situation for women in Afghanistan has barely changed. Wearing the burkah is no longer law—but women are in danger of being beaten if they dare to appear in public without it. In September, the same journalist who made the CNN documentary “Behind the Veil” before the invasion returned to Afghanistan to report on the grim situation for women now. The new documentary interview shines a light on an epidemic of young women with serious burns—from setting themselves afire with household kerosene in acts of defiance and despair at arranged marriages.

The same lies and hypocrisy are evident in the Iraq war as well. In summer 2003, L. Paul Bremer, the top administrator of the U.S. occupation, assembled the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). Among those appointed by Bremer were Islamists who openly declared their intent to restrict women’s rights. Then, on December 29, 2003, the IGC held a quasi-secret vote to replace Iraq’s 1959 family law which was among the most progressive in the Middle East. The family law had been enacted in 1959 by the secular nationalist government of Abd Al Karim Qasim, who was later overthrown by the Ba’athists (with support from the United States). These laws came into being on the heels of mass mobilization of the Iraqi women’s movement at the end of the British colonial era. Aspects of the progressive family law persisted until the eve of the U.S. invasion. Divorce cases were to be heard only in civil courts, and women divorcees had an equal right to custody over their children. Women’s income was recognized as independent from their husbands. The law also restricted child marriage and granted women and men equal shares of inheritance.

The occupation authorities consistently undermined Iraqi women’s efforts to secure their legal rights. The U.S. threw its weight behind Iraq’s Shiite Islamists, calculating that these forces, long suppressed by Saddam Hussein, would cooperate with the occupation and deliver the stability needed for the U.S. The first battle in the drafting of Iraq’s constitution was over the family laws. The U.S.-backed forces reviled the 1959 law for being “secular” and spawning “deviant decisions that tore families apart.” They also demanded that interpretation of family law be removed from civil authority and handed back to the clerics.

Further, the new Iraqi Constitution that Bush and the media glorify as bringing democracy to Iraq, in reality finalized the establishment of an Islamic Republic. Article 2 of the final version of the constitution makes Islam the official religion of Iraq and its state and makes it clear that no law can be passed to contradict it. Article 14 of the final constitution guarantees equal rights for women—only so long as those rights do not “violate Sharia” (Islamic law). So Sharia comes first. According to Sharia, only fathers can have custody of children in case of divorce. Women are officially valued at only half the worth of men in matters such as inheritance and bearing witness in court.

Meanwhile, Shiite militias patrol the streets of Iraq’s major cities, attacking women who don’t dress or behave to their liking. In many places, they kill women who wear pants or appear in public without a headscarf. In much of Iraq, women are virtually confined to their homes because of the likelihood of being beaten, raped, or abducted in the streets. The Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Sistani—a U.S. ally—ordered all Iraqi women to wear headscarves, and his edicts were enforced by beheadings and acid attacks. In 2006, Sistani also issued an order for the killing of gays and lesbians, which was publicized for several months on his website. And a recent UN report states that 250 women were killed in honor killings in Iraqi Kurdistan alone thus far this year—most of them burned alive.

If David Horowitz really gave a damn about the status of women under Islam, he would be denouncing and protesting at the White House.

## Honor Killings

Horowitz and Chesler make use of a surge in honor killings in Iraq and the region more generally to also make their case that there is something unique and intrinsically worse about Islam than any other ideology or religion. To be clear: honor killings are barbaric. They are a horrific manifestation of property relations and of the fact that societies have treated women first and foremost as the property of males. They are one more reason that this whole world needs to be turned right side up through communist revolution and a radical rupture with all traditional property relations and all traditional ideas.

But Horowitz, Chesler & Co. once again take some truths about honor killings to buttress a big lie. First off, incidents of honor killings in Iraq have increased as Iraqi