



A Slow-Motion Honor Killing

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A seventeen-year-old girl from Ohio, Rifqa Bary, fears for her life today. She is afraid that her own parents will murder her. Her father, she explains, "said he would kill me. Or he'd have me sent back to Sri Lanka where they'd put me in the asylum." Her crime in their eyes? She has converted to Christianity from Islam -- bringing to the fore once again the prevalence within Islamic communities in the West of attitudes and beliefs that foster honor killings and the murder of apostates from Islam.

Rifqa has fled to Florida, where she has become the center of a bitter custody battle with her parents -- and she herself is adamant that if she is forced to return to her parents, her life will be in danger: "if I had stayed in Ohio," she says flatly, "I wouldn't be alive." If she is made to return, she says, "I will die within a week. My life is at stake. My dad threatened me." Rifqa is under threat both because of Islam's apostasy law and because, as she herself explains, by converting to Christianity she has besmirched the family's honor: "in 150 generations of my family no one has known Jesus. I am the first one. Imagine the honor in killing me. There is great honor in that."

Rifqa appeared to be aware that many Westerners would be surprised to hear that she considers herself under the threat of death because of Islam's stance toward those who leave the faith: "Islam," she explained, "is very different than you guys think. They have to kill me. My blood is now halal, which means that because I am now a Christian, I'm from a Muslim background, it's an honor. If they love God more than me, they have to do this. And I'm fighting for my life."

She might have had in mind the smooth deceptions that Imam Hatim Hamidullah of the Islamic Society of Central Florida spread Monday during his appearance at her custody hearing in Orange Circuit Court in Florida. "It is not Islam," said Hamidullah, "for the father to bring harm upon his blood daughter or any other human being because of anger. Our position is to exhaust all measures that would bring peace and harmony back to the family. Being angry and threatening the life of someone is not one of those methods." Hamidullah chose his words carefully: he didn't actually say that Islam doesn't prescribe the death penalty for apostasy. He just said that the father shouldn't harm his daughter because he is angry with her. This leaves the door open for the father to murder his daughter for apostasy or honor, as long as he does it dispassionately.

Other Islamic spokesmen in the U.S. have been even more flagrantly deceptive. M. Cherif Bassiouni, a professor of Law at DePaul University and President of the International Human Rights Law Institute, asserted about the notorious Abdul Rahman apostasy case in Afghanistan in 2006 that "a Muslim's conversion to Christianity is not a crime punishable by death under Islamic law." This is simply false. Islam's death penalty for apostates is only a dead letter if no one cares or is able to enforce it in a particular case, but it is deeply rooted within Islam. Some argue that it derives from Qur'an 4:89, which speaks of those who have embraced the Islamic faith and then turned "renegade," directing Muslims to "seize them and slay them wherever ye find them." Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, said, "Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him" (Bukhari, vol. 9, bk. 84, no. 57). This is a universal principle in Islamic law. The Islamic scholar and ex-Muslim Ibn Warraq explains that all the schools of Islamic jurisprudence teach this: "Under Muslim law, the male apostate must be put to death, as long as he is an adult, and in full possession of his faculties....According to Hanafis and Shia, a woman is imprisoned until she repents and adopts Islam once more, but according to the influential Ibn Hanbal, and the Malikis and Shafiites, she is also put to death."

Rifqa Bary hails from Sri Lanka, where the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence prevails. A Shafi'i manual of Islamic law directs that "when a person who has reached puberty and is sane voluntarily apostatizes from Islam, he deserves to be killed. In such a case, it is obligatory for the caliph (A: or his representative) to ask him to repent and return to Islam. If he does, it is accepted from him, but if he refuses, he is immediately killed." ('Umdat al-Salik o8.1-2).

The internationally renowned Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, whom Saudi-funded Islamic apologist/scholar John Esposito of Georgetown University famously called "a reformist," is likewise adamant: "Muslim jurists are unanimous that apostates must be punished, yet they differ as to determining the kind of punishment to be inflicted upon them. The majority of them, including the four main schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali) as well as the other four schools of jurisprudence (the four Shiite schools of Az-Zaidiyyah, Al-Ithna-'ashriyyah, Al-Ja'fariyyah, and Az-Zaheriyyah) agree that apostates must be executed."

Because of these mainstream and authoritative Islamic teachings, a girl's life is in danger today. And as long as American authorities

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continue to pretend that the great mass of Muslims in the United States ignore or reject these traditional teachings of Islam, there will be many more young girls who will share Rifqa Bary's plight.

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