

Forced marriage: the real racism lies in our failure to protect victims

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Forced marriage is to become a criminal offence. I am tempted to think progress is being made and that many young girls will now be saved from a life of rape and servitude. I'm afraid I remain somewhat sceptical however, because laws mean nothing if they are not enforced.

The real test of the law is not with MPs in Parliament, it is with the police, social workers, and other public services, for it is their actions which will determine if young girls will be saved from a life of rape and servitude – and it is they who need to be free to do their jobs without fear or favour.

As Keith Porteous Wood so rightly pointed out last week, female genital mutilation (FGM) has been a crime in this country for 25 years. Never a single prosecution has been made. Not one. I fear the same could happen with forced marriage.

On Sunday morning, the BBC broadcast a discussion on forced marriage and asked if we have shied away from tackling it because we fear being labelled racist. This argument is common and unfortunately, I think it is a fair charge.

We have decided it may well be racist to intervene to protect a young girl because her attackers (and it is an attack) are black or Asian. But here's the thing... SO. IS. SHE. Victims of FGM and forced marriage are of the same ethnicity as their attackers, so how exactly is it racist to want these girls protected? There is no racism in demanding that the law be applied equally to all. The real racism lies in the ludicrous thought that somehow a young Somali girl or a young Pakistani girl doesn't mind being forced to marry a stranger, or won't feel the same pain from rape or mutilation that white girls do (we either think they don't feel it or we don't care that they do).

Well I've got news, these girls feel pain every bit as much pain as I do and every bit as much as you do. Bladder infections, fistula, agonising sex and childbirth? Yep, black and Asian women feel all these things too. We are failing to protect these women and girls because we are not prosecuting those who hurt them. By not prosecuting, the cruelty carries on and on with impunity and more and more girls suffer... and they are suffering because of their ethnicity.

A few years ago, the *Guardian* published an interview with a young British girl who had been taken to Africa to have her genitals mutilated. She was asked how she would tackle this issue. She said she wanted a gynaecologist at every airport in the UK! When asked if this wasn't a bit harsh, she responded by asking if it was as harsh as having her clitoris cut away and being subjected to a lifetime of agony. Is she a racist too? What about Southall Black Sisters who fight for the rights of black and Asian women? Racists? Of course not. There is no racism in applying the law and protecting all people equally: the racism comes in failing to do so. We're failing to protect young black and Asian girls because of their race and all in the name of opposing racism – it is Orwellian.

But there is another factor here – this has been done quite deliberately. We have been bullied in to this by Islamists and misogynists who have purposefully muddied the waters and labelled people racists for opposing their hateful ideologies. The brave and brilliant former Labour MP Ann Cryer

was labelled a racist by just such groups when she protested against the forced marriage of young girls in her constituency. The Islamists and misogynists have been aided in this by some on the political left – many of whom have sided with Islamists in opposition to the rights of women and girls. Unite Against Fascism chanted 'Allahu Akbar' alongside Muslims Against Crusades and in opposition to One Law for All at a rally outside Downing Street in 2010. Muslims Against Crusades openly campaign for a sharia state in Britain; a state where women would be the property of men and would have no rights or protection against violence and abuse.

I was once accused, by gay activists, of "pushing the BNP agenda". Really? I wasn't aware that the rights of black and Asian women were top of the list of the BNP's concerns! Let's make this clear once and for all – the BNP and their ilk do not oppose sharia and Islamism because they are concerned for the rights of women – they oppose it because it is political opportunism and they are jumping on the human rights bandwagon to promote their racist and inhuman agenda. The BNP wants a white Britain – I don't. The BNP doesn't want sharia law in Britain because it is "foreign" – I don't want it anywhere (for anyone) because it is violent, brutal, and inhuman. This nonsense has to stop.

Recently the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Bernard Hogan-Howe, told his officers that he would not tolerate any racism in the force. He was right to do so. Racism must be stamped out. But what I would add to this is that officers will be protected from bogus or vexatious accusations of racism, and that turning a blind eye to the abuse of black and Asian girls is just as intolerable. The message that the law must apply equally to all needs to be driven home and police officers should not be frightened to tackle these issues by worries that it might mean risking their careers, their mortgage payments, and the roof over their family's head. The police should be told that they must enforce the law no matter what colour the offender is and they must do so to protect victims of crime, no matter what colour the victim is.

This situation can be resolved, we can provide justice and protection for all people – it can be summed up in four little words: One. Law. For. All.

N/A

Anne Marie Waters was a member of the NSS. The views expressed in our blogs are those of the author and may not necessarily represent the views of the NSS.

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