

There can be no cultural get-out clause for child abusers

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By Anne Marie Waters

It's official – raping children is wrong. Sometimes. It depends on the colour (sorry "culture") of the child being raped. Welcome to post-racism Europe.

Over the last couple of weeks, the ugliness of state multiculturalism has raised its head yet again. By 'state multiculturalism' I mean multiculturalism as practised by the state and its institutions. In day to day life, it means treating one 'group' completely differently based on what "culture" they claim to belong to. It means condemning something when it happens to a person of one particular group, while ignoring the very same thing when it happens to a member of another particular group.

It is racist, it is ugly and we must speak out against it.

Last week, the *Telegraph* [reported](#) that four people had pleaded guilty to child sex offences at Reading Crown Court. According to various reports, children as young as eight years old were forced to have sex with adults at a farmhouse in Wiltshire.

The paedophile ring had been infiltrated by undercover police officers who, among other things, found thousands of indecent photos and pornographic movies involving children. Sentences of between three and eleven years in prison have been handed down.

Meanwhile, on another planet, this happens: a *Sunday Times* reporter goes undercover and asks an imam to "marry" his 12 year old daughter (you know, so she isn't exposed to sexual impropriety).

The imam agrees but only if the father will keep it a secret. Imam Mohammed Kassamali, of the Husaini Islamic Centre in Peterborough said "I would love the girl to go to her husband's houses as soon as possible, the younger the better. Under sharia there is no problem. It is said she should see her first sign of puberty at the house of her husband. The problem is that we cannot explain such things if the girl went tomorrow [to the authorities]."

Abdul Haque, an imam at the Shoreditch mosque in east London agreed to officiate but recommended that the reporter "tell people it is an engagement but it will be a marriage". He added "In Islam, once the girl reaches puberty the father has the right, the parents have the right, but under the laws of this country if the girl complains and says her marriage has been arranged and she wasn't of marriageable age, then the person who performed the marriage will be jailed as well as the mother and father".

This isn't news. In January of this year, the *Islington Tribune* [reported](#) that girls as young as nine are being "married" in sharia courts in that borough. Diana Nammi, leader of the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) told the *Tribune* that the children are "still expected to carry out their wifely duties, though, and that includes sleeping with their husband".

A couple of months later, it was [reported](#) that a five year old had been "married" in London and had "received assistance" from the Government's Forced Marriage Unit. The same report declared that around 400 children had received the same assistance in only one year.

According to the *Sunday Times* report, Farooq Murad, secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Britain, said: "We are strongly opposed to it on the basis that it is illegal under the law of the land where we are living and even *under sharia it is highly debateable*". (My emphasis). Note he is against it not because it is an abhorrent crime which causes immense damage to young girls, not because it takes young girls out of school and hands them to men to live a life of servitude and sexual slavery. No, none of this. He also said "*under sharia it is highly debateable*". But, who exactly is going to win that debate and what happens to these girls in the meantime?

When I wrote to the Justice Department on behalf of the One Law for All campaign asking why they were permitting sharia courts to discriminate against women, make child custody decisions that can be dangerous for the children involved, and allow domestic violence (among other human rights abuses) they replied saying "we do not prevent people living in accordance with religious beliefs or cultural practices". Indeed. Apparently though, this is the latest response from the Home Office: "Child marriage is totally unacceptable and illegal. Perceived cultural sensitivities and political correctness cannot and will not get in the way of preventing and uncovering such abuse".

Why then have these imams not been arrested and at very least questioned? Why aren't the police demanding a list of "marriages" being carried out under sharia law in this country and why aren't they checking whether these girls are being raped as alleged by IKWRO? Why is sharia family law being permitted in any way, shape, or form in the UK when we know this is going on?

The rape of a child, any child, is about as disgusting and inhumane a criminal act as is imaginable. Arranging such rapes is almost as abhorrent. We must, as a society, be united in our condemnation of this. But it seems we are not, because sharia courts and tribunals are up and running with the full blessing of successive governments. They need to be shut down – just like any other body would if it were handing over young children to be repeatedly raped.

Please help to make this happen and [sign this petition](#).

The National Secular Society and One Law for All will continue to work to prevent the racism of applying separate laws to separate groups, and we will not stop until rape is rape and rapists (or those who facilitate them) are punished – no matter what colour, religion or "culture" is involved.

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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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