

It's not culture, it's a crime against humanity

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When is a crime against humanity not a crime against humanity? When it is applied to women of course.

Here's a quick description:

Crimes against humanity, as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court Explanatory Memorandum, "are particularly odious offenses in that they constitute a serious attack on human dignity or grave humiliation or a degradation of human beings." They are not isolated or sporadic events, but are part either of a government policy (although the perpetrators need not identify themselves with this policy) or of a wide practice of atrocities tolerated or condoned by a government or a de facto authority. Murder; extermination; torture; rape; political, racial, or religious persecution and other inhumane acts reach the threshold of crimes against humanity only if they are part of a widespread or systematic practice. Isolated inhumane acts of this nature may constitute grave infringements of human rights, or depending on the circumstances, war crimes, but may fall short of falling into the category of crimes under discussion.

To accompany this, here is (part) of an email I received this week:

My life has become a nightmare as my father physically beats me. He hates that I wish to pursue higher education since he and my mother are trying to marry me off in a couple of months to an extremist Muslim who is not in the favour of educating woman just as my family. I wanted to get help here in Saudi Arabia but the laws here support the male guardians over anything else. Saudi government will not bring a father or a husband to justice for murdering their daughters or wives. I know that I cannot do this without fear of being killed from my father or government.

In short, a crime against humanity is being committed in Saudi Arabia. The same can be said for Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere; every bit of it is propped up by religion, justified by religion, and strengthened by religion.

The re-Talibanisation of Afghanistan began in earnest last week when women were told they could not leave their house without being accompanied by a male guardian. This is the case in Saudi also. The [Afghan order came in the form of a fatwa](#) (religious ruling) which included a warning that any attempts to block it would result in "jihad". In other words, the clerics of Afghanistan have imprisoned and enslaved women (again), the fatwa was not over-ruled by the government, and thus a crime against humanity has been committed. Such crimes are committed routinely in Afghanistan and we were told this week that the number of rape victims languishing in prison there (for being raped) has [increased by 50% in just one year](#).

In Iran, the government commits a similar crime against humanity by stoning women to death for adultery, as well as other barbaric injustices. The Iranian penal code even stipulates [the size of the stone](#); it cannot be so big as to cause a fast death, it cannot be so small as to cause a relatively painless one. They've got all bases covered.

In Pakistan, a staggering 90% of women are subject to domestic abuse. Despite feeble attempts to deal with this, women still do not have any practical protection. Domestic violence is still "endemic" and the [misogyny that drives it still mainstream](#).

In summary, crimes against humanity are committed with impunity. But don't expect to hear them called that. When committed against a woman, a crime against humanity undergoes a remarkable metamorphosis and becomes "culture" (aka religion). "Culture" — for those insufficiently trained in politically correct totalitarianism — is entirely positive, cannot change, and if you disagree even slightly, you are a racist. Those are the rules.

The United Nations, founded after World War II (partly) to promote human rights and global justice, has not — as you might expect — taken sufficient steps to stamp out these crimes. In fact, the opposite is true; Despite characterising freedom of speech as a universal right, the United Nations is being brow-beaten by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (Cooperation... whatever) in to accepting an [international law preventing criticism of Islam](#) — and you can bet that the practices carried out in its name (i.e. crimes against humanity) will be covered by this anti-blasphemy edict.

In her fantastic book '[Are Women Human?](#)' Catharine MacKinnon argues that human rights laws across the globe simply don't apply to women — such laws are side-stepped and ignored. Crimes against women are routinely sanitised as "tradition", "conservative", "cultural" and of course "religious" — all untouchable, all beyond criticism.

When the Rushdie affair taught us the new rule on not criticising religion, we accepted it without question. Now, women all over the world are having their rights removed (including western women) because the truth about the religious nature of these crimes is suppressed. We cannot insult religion, and if a few women are imprisoned, raped, enslaved, tortured, humiliated, and beaten as a result — then so be it.

See also: [FGM: 30 million girls at risk](#)

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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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