

# Double-talk and betrayal put massive obstacles in the way of women's rights

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***Using the language of freedom, Islamists are turning back the clock on women's human rights. Segregation in universities is just another example, argues Anne Marie Waters.***

There has been condemnation from both the left and right following revelations that gender segregation is taking place in British universities. Last Tuesday (on Human Rights Day) I spoke at a protest — which I attended on behalf of the National Secular Society — against Universities UK (UUK), the so-called "voice of the UK's universities", which issued guidance recently stating that it was A-OK to segregate men and women at public debates if some Islamist misogynist requires it be so.

The guidance of UUK stated that universities must consider freedom of speech alongside discrimination and equality considerations if faced with a request, from a speaker, that an audience be segregated along gender lines. The Chief Executive of UUK, Nicola Dandridge, told the Guardian that as long as participants were happy with arrangements, and neither sex was disadvantaged, [segregation should be permitted](#). It appears she is concerned that said Islamist misogynist may have his freedom of speech infringed if his demands for segregated audiences are not adhered to – in which case the Islamist misogynist may not wish to speak.

I am pretty much speechless.

First of all, how on earth does a person choosing not to speak because they don't have their backward medievalism pandered to, have his right to free speech impeded? He doesn't, he chooses not to speak. He will not be physically incapable of opening his mouth at the sight of women and men sitting together.

Secondly, "voluntary segregation" is simply not possible, or plausible. Take this example; if a room is "segregated" and I go in there and decide to sit with the men, will I be moved? If yes, then it is enforced. If I will not be asked to move, then the room is not segregated.

Here we go again with this Orwellian nonsense, designed to confuse.

As I said at the protest last Tuesday, language is being manipulated and abused by Islamists and their enablers to hide the nasty realities of this situation. "Voluntary segregation", "freedom of speech" and "religious freedom" are being thrown about as justifications for turning the clock back and pushing women to the edge yet again.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown [quite rightly articulated](#) what is going on here, when she appeared on Channel 4 following Tuesday night's protests. She said that Islamists were using democracy to destroy democracy and she is absolutely right.

This is not news and has been going on for a very long time. Using the language of rights and freedoms, Islamists have succeeded in setting up sharia courts in Britain in which women are treated as sub-human and deserving of violence. It is their "right" to religious freedom to do just

that.

Using the language of rights and freedoms, Islamists have set up schools in which young girls are forced to cover themselves entirely lest they unleash their sinfulness on to the world via the crime of visibility. This too is the ["right" to religious freedom](#) of the schools' Islamist masters.

University segregation is just another example. Time after time, using the language of freedom, Islamists are turning back the clock. They are testing the waters, and finding out — no doubt to their glee — that where women are concerned, the religious right to despise us will triumph time after time.

In human rights law, there are absolute rights and there are qualified rights. Religious freedom is a qualified right, which thus must be balanced against other competing rights on a case-by-case basis. As you can imagine, women's autonomy and dignity regularly clash with 7th century ideas of accursed temptresses.

At the United Nations recently, a resolution aimed at protecting women's rights campaigners removed the following requirement in order to get Iran, the Vatican, and others to agree. The request that member states "strongly condemn all forms of violence against women and women human rights defenders and refrain from invoking any customs, traditions or religious consideration to avoid their obligations" was wiped away. So the UN (which is proving itself to be increasingly useless in this area) has effectively agreed that [violence against women is fine](#), provided it is in line with religious belief (which it quite often is).

The European Union's Parliament just this week rejected a report on Sexual and Reproductive Rights following intense lobbying by religious groups. MEP Mikael Gustafsson, Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, said: "I remain ashamed and stunned that so many people still can't see how important sexual and reproductive health and rights are to achieving gender equality in the EU and beyond."

Mr Gustafsson is wrong about that, people can see how important these rights are in the fight for the autonomy and basic human rights of women, but they believe that religious beliefs are more important.

The UN also believes this, as does Universities UK, and the Islamists are lapping it up.

**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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