

SECOND AS FARCE
by Marilyn Casselman © 2007

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“History repeats itself; first as tragedy,
second as farce.” Karl Marx

Women have been written out of history, so
the idea of repeating it as tragedy would be a non-
starter. So I’m going to talk about the second part –
the farce.

Throughout these hearings, women have
claimed, repeatedly, that their religious symbols,
clothing, behavior and slogans, are not signs of
oppression; that they are not oppressed by their
religion; that the ideology that controls their lives is
not male-dominated; and that they are not unequal
in terms of religious doctrine.

This naivete dishonors the knowledge that
women have discovered and constructed as a
consequence of our commitment to understanding
our own reality, at the core of which is the ability to
recognize the causes and effects of women’s

submissiveness.

It also dishonors the decades-long struggles of Canadian women and their American and Western sisters, and women around the world, to advance the cause of women's rights and liberation from male domination in its many forms. I would suggest, then, that anyone who claims to be exempt from this subordination, educate herself about the women's movement, how it came about, and why it was necessary; and stop insulting my intelligence.

All monotheistic religions oppress women: we know this. Thus, we can look at the highly enlightened legal construct of the separation of church and state, as one of the most profound protections of women's liberty. It would be farcical, therefore, to invite religious practices into our social, cultural and institutional policies and legislation.

All monotheistic religions are patriarchal and the oppression of women is a basic principle of their ideology. The ultimate payoff in this scheme, is in making women feel culpable for male oppression and violence. This manifests itself here,

today, in women's fear to express the truth about their own subordination.

Theocracies have the right to control women by law and according to male dictates. That alone is sufficient to make anyone fight to keep religion out of government and protect the basic democratic principle of the separation of church and state from collapsing. Not to do so, would result in an historical burlesque: complete with the chorus of "why didn't we see it coming; why didn't we speak up;" and "why didn't we try to DO something to stop it?" Sound familiar?

The second scenario would have, as its theme, women's delusions about male power. This relates to the claim that these women are not unequal – which presumes, therefore, that their equality is a default position. Let me un-confuse you.

Patriarchal power is that of all men lumped together. It is constructed on the claims of male superiority and women are what this male authority sets itself over.

It is held collectively and defended by men

in association with one another – both aggressively and passively. This gives each cog in the patriarchal wheel the right to have the upper hand and males learn this early on. From this position, a man who applies pressure to dominate women is implicitly validated. Male power is totalitarian in nature and women are tied into it as perpetual losers. Pretending to know nothing about this is just silly.

Islam is a patriarchal, totalitarian, theocracy and connects all Muslims – moderate, fundamentalist, and jihadist. Because it claims to be the one true religion, the drive to impose itself on the world as the one form of government is energetic, to say the least. I read the news. I know the list.

Moderate Islam? A day or two after the “moderate Islamists” took power in Turkey, recently, they declared all women and children to be under the protection of men. This is called second-class citizenship, the polite description of repression and also known as inequality.

If anyone thinks that democracy is some

sort of vaccination against Islam – that’s just another delusion, as the cowboys and girls in the Bush White House have found out. They were actually surprised by the election of a majority of Hamas candidates in Palestine, and Hezbollah’s gains in Lebanon; which is a farce in and of itself.

The Christians are breathing down our necks. The Pope rushes about, expanding his territory by making false promises to the poor; the priests in Quebec are positioning themselves for a comeback. Catholic Poland announced earlier this year that it would “export its values” to the European Union; at the same time, it eliminated its Women’s Ministry. And the Christian right has caused untold damage to women’s rights in the United States since the “reborn” George W. Bush came into office, seven years ago. And on and on it goes – here, there, everywhere and in Quebec.

And the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Don’t be too complacent about that protecting women’s rights. Fudging it to accommodate religious practices is exactly what these hearings are all about.

Groups organize to gain power, and promoters of Islam have been working toward integrating Islamic law into democratic legislation for years. Sharia in Ontario is an example of this.

While this was playing out, I heard an Iranian social worker speak about why this sharia plan must be defeated. During her presentation, she recited a shameful litany of the abuse, imprisonment, violence, deprivation and unthinkable subjugation suffered by immigrant Muslim women and girls **in Toronto**.

After a tense debate and getting to the veritable brink of disaster – the Attorney General threw the sharia idea out. Quebec quickly dispatched it; and I expect Quebec, Quebecers and Canadians to keep religion out of government, period.

Lastly... the “ignorance, fear, anti-immigrant, racist” charge – that convenient catch-all thrown up when one is unable to rationally defend one’s position.

Not everyone is ignorant about others’ religions, nor do they fear them. Mainly, what

people fear is fanaticism and ignorance itself.

And virtually everyone in this country has lived with immigrants throughout our history and it is my experience that we have not treated them any more badly than our own compatriots – or for that matter, the members of our own families. If you want a lesson in prejudice and bad treatment, learn about the North American Natives, who are your fellow citizens. Better yet, get to know them.

As for racism, it's an easy card to play; but it's not me who's confusing race and religion. So don't lay that scenario on me, thank you.

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