



UK grooming gangs and Islam

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Executive Summary

Dr Mark Durie, Senior Research Fellow at the Athur Jeffery Centre for the Study of Islam at Melbourne School of Theology, has explored Islamic theological and legal foundations of the UK grooming gangs' activities.

This is the executive summary of his paper, which is available to share and download.

Durie's paper explores possible influences of Islamic theology and law on the grooming gang phenomenon in the UK, in which organised gangs of mainly Muslim men have intimidated, controlled, raped, tortured and sexually exploited underage girls, most of whom have been white non-Muslims. Both victims and perpetrators number in the thousands.

It is acknowledged that grooming gangs are just one of many kinds of sexual abuse of children.

There is widespread concern that the authorities have mishandled the grooming gang crisis, often showing more empathy for abusers than for victims. A national inquiry, announced in 2025, has stalled over concerns that the government is attempting to water down the inquiry.

Secular religious illiteracy has been a contributor to UK society's inaction, impacting people's ability to recognise religious influences on the grooming gangs' activities. Western societies can find it difficult to appreciate the impact religions have upon cultures.

Commentary on the grooming gangs has at times focussed on ethnicity, while avoiding reference to religion as a potential driver of the abuse. The "Asian" ethnic label has been misleading as both too broad and too narrow, obscuring the actual pattern of abuse. In reality, the Islamic religion has a stronger correlation than ethnicity with grooming gang criminality: there is prima facie evidence that in the majority of cases the abusers have been Muslims.

In the UK, Muslim identity has also been linked to other sex crimes impacting girls and women, as well as sex crimes in other Western nations. There are also credible reports from Muslim

nations, for example Pakistan and Egypt, of a pattern of sex crimes committed by Muslim men against non-Muslim girls and women.

Eight aspects of Islamic law and theology are identified that are proposed to influence and enable the grooming gangs' criminality. (It is emphasised that religious drivers can motivate behaviours which are strictly speaking prohibited by the religion's teachings.) The eight factors are:

1. The doctrine of the superiority of Muslims over non-Muslims.
2. The doctrine of loyalty and disavowal, also known as 'love and hate for the sake of God'.
3. The superiority and dominance of men over women.
4. The mandated seclusion of women by men.
5. The religious practice of forced marriage, and the lack of a concept of an age of consent.
6. The perceived threat of dangerous female sexuality.
7. The practice of sex slavery as an aspect of the laws of jihad.
8. Dhimmitude and the treatment of conquered non-Muslim peoples in Islamic law.

Not all Muslim groups are equally impacted by these teachings, and it must be acknowledged that the 'street Islam' of grooming gangs is not in strict compliance with Islamic law.

The following recommendations are made:

1. Fears of stoking Islamophobia should not be allowed to skuttle transparent investigation of the grooming gangs' religious cultures.
2. The religious identities of both perpetrators and victims should be rigorously recorded.
3. Police should be trained to interview grooming gang suspects concerning their religious beliefs.

4. Police should also be trained to investigate religious aspects of the testimony of victims.
5. The state should enforce a legal prohibition of unregistered sharia marriages.
6. The role of abusers' family members in enabling abuses must be considered.
7. Islamic religious leaders should be called upon to disavow the activities of grooming gangs as well as certain religious beliefs which have enabled grooming gang activities.
8. Politicians should refrain from making dismissive but ignorant claims concerning what Islam does and doesn't teach about human sexual relations.
9. It must be publicly acknowledged that there are Muslims who reject key elements of the grooming gangs' religious cultures.
10. The UK Forced Marriage Unit should remove statements on its website that there is no religious basis to forced marriages in Islam.
11. Awareness training should be provided to vulnerable white working-class communities who are being targeted by grooming gangs. (The Sikh community already have programs which could be used as a model.)



The author

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Introduction

The many prosecutions of grooming gangs over the past dozen years have shocked the UK public for several reasons: the youth and large number of female victims; the large number of perpetrators; the large size of the gangs; the multi-generational kinship connections of some gangs; the extreme, demeaning brutality of the abuse; the arrogance and contempt that some perpetrators have displayed in court; descriptions of abusers as “Asian” or “Pakistani”; the perpetrators being mainly Muslims; the victims being mainly white non-Muslims;¹ the entrenched denial by public officials; the repeated failures of the criminal justice system; the ineffectiveness of public reviews to bring about lasting change; and the fact that some reported victims have gone missing and are presumed to have been killed.² As Jacob Jones, the father of one victim, put it, “When someone suggests that all rape is a type of sexual abuse, they are wrong: the gang rape inflicted on my daughter by Muslim men, monsters, is not like any other type of rape. It is deeply personal, physically damaging, sadistic and, apparently, religiously motivated; it is a living hell like no other.”

A recent investigation by GB News reporter Charlie Peters identified 50 towns and cities across the UK where grooming gangs have been active. The independent Rape Gang Inquiry, launched in March 2025 by Rupert Lowe, MP, has identified 85 local authorities in which gang-based sexual exploitation of children has been taking place. There have reportedly only been successful prosecutions in 20 localities.

1 The Muslim Women's Network UK in 2013 produced a report, Unheard Voices: Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girls and Young Women, which considered 35 reported instances of young Asian girls and women who had been sexually exploited. Of these, 32 victims were Muslims, one was Sikh, and two were of unknown religion. The victims' backgrounds were mainly Pakistani, but a small number came from Bangladeshi, Indian, Afghan and Somali backgrounds. Unheard Voices found that in most cases, perpetrators were from the same community as the victims: the most common pattern involved Pakistani Muslim men abusing Pakistani Muslim girls. The overwhelming majority of victims were under 16 years old when the grooming began and most were 13 or 14.

2 Peter McLoughlin. 2014. “Easy Meat”: Multiculturalism, Islam and Child Sex Slavery, pp. 49–50.

A specialist police team launched in 2003 has made over a thousand arrests, and the greater Manchester police are currently investigating over one thousand grooming gang suspects.

We are far from grasping the full extent of grooming gang criminality in the UK. It is reasonable to assume that since sexual abuse of all kinds tends to be under-reported, this is also true of grooming gangs. *The Independent* has reported that almost 19,000 children were identified as sexual exploitation victims in England in one year alone, so since this has been going on for decades, it seems that victims must number in at least several tens of thousands; but this could well be just the tip of a much larger iceberg.

In January 2025, Elon Musk publicly attacked Prime Minister Keir Starmer for being “complicit in the rape of Britain”. This forcefully brought the UK's grooming gang crisis to international attention. Starmer, who was the UK's Director of Public Prosecutions from 2008 to 2013 – a period when there was a dearth of prosecutions of grooming gangs – at first dismissed what he called “lies and misinformation” connected with the “far right”, rejecting calls for a national inquiry into child sexual exploitation.

However, in June 2025, Starmer's government backed down and announced a national inquiry.³ This was in response to Baroness Casey's National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (the “Casey Review”). In the wake of the Casey Review's release, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper announced that the police forces have identified at least 800 cases involving child sexual exploitation allegations that were closed with no further action, but which will now be reviewed. She expected that this figure will rise to more than 1,000.

The Casey Review provided evidence that the ethnicity of abusers is a significant factor that needs to be investigated. She wrote “The system claims there is an overwhelming problem with

3 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c7872pngj2qo>

White perpetrators when that can't be proved" (p. 5). She deplored the "appalling lack of data on ethnicity in crime recording" (p. 4) and the lack of research into the drivers of group-based sexual exploitation in general, writing, "Instead of examination, we have seen obfuscation" (p. 5). She highlighted a pattern in which review after review has been conducted, but recommendations have not been acted upon.

Baroness Casey concluded that the criminal justice system, in compounding the damage to victims, has made their sufferings worse, while rarely acknowledging its own failings. She found "many examples of organisations avoiding the topic altogether for fear of appearing racist, raising community tensions or causing community cohesion problems" (p. 125). She pointed out that, far from reducing tensions, suppression of information about these crimes increases tensions and discourages victims from coming forward.

As at the end of October 2025, the national inquiry has stalled and is in a shambles. One reported impediment to getting underway is that potential chairs are refusing to take on the role. There are also concerns that the government will attempt to water down the inquiry by including other forms of child sexual exploitation. Five members of the Inquiry's survivor panel have resigned (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) over concerns about lack of transparency, and attempts to water down the inquiry. Ellie-Ann Reynolds, the second to resign, said, "The final turning point for me was the push to widen the remit of the National Inquiry in ways that downplay the racial and religious motivations behind our abuse." Former police detective and Rochdale grooming gang whistleblower Maggie Oliver has rejected the inquiry as "just the latest in a long line of attempts to conceal the truth around 'grooming gangs'".

The UK grooming gang crisis is an egregious failure of multiculturalism. There has been "a culture of not wanting to rock the multicultural community boat", as Denis MacShane, former MP for Rotherham, confessed about his own failure

to inquire into what was going on. Reluctance to tell the truth about the grooming gangs remains an ongoing source of trauma and deep frustration for many UK citizens.

The people impacted by this epidemic of abuse, which include not only the victims but also their families, friends and supporters, must now number in the hundreds of thousands. Many have been denigrated for speaking up. Sara Rowbotham, a whistleblower on the Rochdale rapes, commented:

It's disgusting that we were disbelieved, scrutinised, misrepresented, scapegoated, and then publicly and nationally discredited by both the police and local authority. We were blamed, and they said it was my fault. The team worked so hard. We had to hear horrendous things. We worried about young people and we tried every strategy to try and change things, only then to have our professionalism and qualifications questioned in a review. All we were trying to do was to get protective services to do their job.

There has been a pattern of empathy for abusers, but not for victims.

Baroness Casey's audit highlighted the need for greater understanding of the drivers of these crimes. Here I shall put the case that the religion of Islam needs to be taken into account as a possible contributing factor to the UK grooming gang phenomenon.

The word 'possible' is used advisedly here. As we shall see, there is strong prima facie evidence that Islam has contributed to these crimes. There is, for example, the striking over-representation of men with Muslim names in grooming gang convictions. However, there has been a systemic avoidance of collecting data on the religious identities of grooming gang members and their victims. To help address this blind spot, this paper proposes a number of potential lines of future inquiry. Yet, in calling for further research into the role of religion in these crimes, it would be naïve in the extreme to assume that there are no

systemic obstacles to undertaking such research in the UK today.

In what follows, I will first note the difficulty secular Western societies have in understanding the impact religions have upon cultures. Religious illiteracy has been a contributor to society's inaction.

Next, I will note the emphasis on ethnicity and the avoidance of references to religion in commentary on the grooming gangs. I will also discuss problems with the "Asian" ethnic label, arguing that it obscures the actual pattern of abuse.

I will then consider evidence from survivor testimonies about the religious aspects of their abuse. This has not been adequately acknowledged in reports and commentary.

Then I will also observe that grooming gang abuse is not the only form of child sexual abuse that has been linked to Muslim identity in the UK. Moreover, I will refer to reports of different kinds of sex crimes involving Muslim immigrants in other Western nations, as well as reports of sex crimes against non-Muslim ethnic minorities in Islamic nations.

Next, I will explore theological and legal features of the Islamic sharia that have the potential to influence and shape a culture of sexual abuse of non-Muslim girls and women by Muslim men.

Finally, I will suggest steps to help suppress these crimes.

Disclaimers

My focus in this article is an inquiry into religious drivers of the UK's grooming gang crisis. I will argue that there are good reasons to believe that the religion of Islam has contributed to the UK grooming gang epidemic. However, since this is a highly sensitive and contested subject capable of inciting strong emotions, I need first to make a number of clarifying observations.

It must be emphasised that the exploitation of the vulnerability of girls by grooming gangs is just one of the many types of sexual abuse of children. Other forms of gang abuse include paedophile gangs and criminal gangs. There is also rape by strangers (both individual and gang rape); the pimping and financial exploitation of girls by individual men; sexual abuse by family members and relatives; forced marriage and marriage trafficking of underage girls; child-on-child sexual abuse, including in schools; sexual exploitation of children through exposure to pornography; and abuse using social media. This is not a complete list.

Although the Casey Review seemed to assume that the reality of sexual exploitation of children is something UK society is only now coming to terms with, sex trafficking of underage girls is an age-old vice with a long history. In a famous series of articles published in 1885, entitled *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*, the journalist W. T. Stead published an exposé of the sex trade in London. He described how wealthy English men were procuring thousands of young virgins every year for sex. The authorities tried to suppress the scandal, and although Stead was jailed for a time, none of the perpetrators he exposed was convicted. Despite opposition, his articles attracted huge international attention, and his reporting led to the age of consent being raised from 13 to 16, where it has stayed to this day.

One of Stead's informants, a professional procurer of virgins for sex, informed him that the optimal age of trafficked girls was 14 to 15. At 13, she said, girls were too much under the influence of their mothers to be easily accessed, and by the age of 16 they were more worldly wise and difficult to lure into a rapist's arms. However, at 14 to 15 they

"begin to get more liberty without getting much more sense".

It seems the age of greatest vulnerability has hardly changed in 150 years. A [2020 Home Office report](#) reviewed various studies and concluded that the most commonly reported age of child sexual exploitation in the UK was 14 to 15.

To be sure, there are factors that can make girls more vulnerable to sex trafficking. For example, girls in care are more likely to be trafficked than girls living with their own parents. The 2020 Home Office report provided a list of such vulnerabilities. It also suggested that offenders may seek out victims with vulnerabilities (p. 18, p. 39), including economic insecurity. However, while many victims have been working-class girls, Dr Ella Hill, a Rotherham grooming gang survivor, has [asserted](#) that "There are a lot of middle-class victims. Perpetrators don't care what the family is like. They threaten to kill her dog, kill her cat, kill her family."⁴

Here I use the expression "grooming gang" without any suggestion that the victims were in any way responsible for their rapes. Many have proposed that the expression "grooming gang" is misleading, because it could imply some kind of consent by the victims to their abuse. This is a sore point, since what has emerged from the reviews is that the authorities have sometimes characterised victims as child prostitutes. Although the alternative, "rape gangs", is not inaccurate, "grooming gang" captures an important element of these rapes, which is psychological control, deliberately cultivated over the victims, to facilitate repeated rape by many men over an extended period of time.

Finally, it must also be acknowledged that several of the Islamic cultural factors I will explore, such as the dominance of men over women or using rape as punishment, are by no means unique to Islamic cultures. I am claiming that Islam can exert *particular* cultural influences that may contribute to the grooming gang phenomenon, not that these influences are unique to Muslim contexts.

⁴ Ella Hill' is a pseudonym.

The Challenge of Western Religious Illiteracy

It is proposed here that the Islamic religion is a potential driver of the UK grooming gang phenomenon. While there has been a blindness to religion in discussions about the grooming gang epidemic, this is but one aspect of a much larger blind spot about religion's power to shape cultures. As Western nations have become more secular, they have become less capable of understanding the religious influences of immigrants. In most cultures, religion plays a much more central role than it does in Western nations. Rafael L. Bardají, former National Security Advisor to the Spanish Prime Minister, put his finger on the issue: "A population that has fundamentally turned its back on its faith cannot understand the religious motivations of others ..."

At the same time, the blindness of Western people to certain features of Islam can be because they project their understandings of Christianity onto it. Many seem to assume that Islam could not be used to justify hatred or violence because it is a religion, and people hold a positive understanding of what a religion is that has been shaped by their understanding of Christianity. This was apparent in the American-Australian singer Marcia Hines' assumption that people follow a religious path to help them be kind to others:

If you tell me that that tree outside is your God, I'd say "Knock yourself out." I have no problem with that. Whatever you want to believe in that will give you faith to be kind. I think for me it's very important to be spiritual. (From The Gospel According to Marcia.)

Such an assumption can cause people to overlook Islamic distinctives: beliefs and practices that are not shared with other world religions. For example, one of Islam's teachings that I will examine is "loyalty and disavowal", sometimes referred to as "love and hatred for the sake of God". The idea that believers should love for God's sake is of course by no means unique to Islam, but the second part of the doctrine – to hate for God's sake – distinguishes Islam from Christianity and the Quran from the Bible.

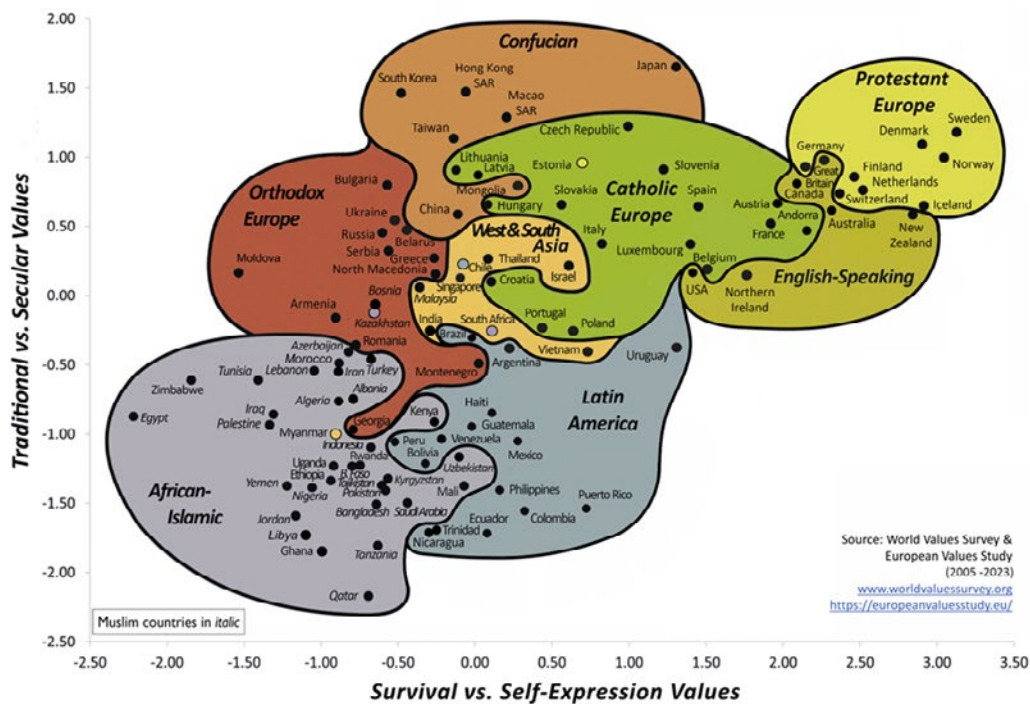
Karl Marx described religion as a drug, "opium", that serves to dull the senses of the downtrodden. For Marx, religion was a product of state and society: a symptom, not a cause. He described religion as an illusory "spiritual aroma" which arises from the suffering world: "Man makes religion, religion does not make man." In the same dismissive vein, bestselling author Kate Mosse, who writes historical novels about religious conflicts, asserted that "Wars of religion are never about faith, as we know. They're always about power and influence."

The idea that religions determine national cultures is also at odds with the multicultural premise that greater cultural diversity, including religious diversity, enhances harmony. The power of faiths to form people's values can instead lead to tensions as different religious worldviews compete to determine the values that govern a nation's way of life. There are many examples of such competition today, such as disagreements over abortion, euthanasia, freedom of speech, affirmative action, gender transitioning, and marriage.

There is a powerful trend in Western secular thought that downplays religion, regarding it as private and irrelevant to public life. This paper works from the opposite conviction: that religion shapes cultures, determining significant differences between societies and nations and influencing culturally conditioned patterns of behaviour. When people from a particular religion display a distinctive and consistent pattern of behaviour, it is reasonable to inquire into how their religion could be influencing that behaviour. For example, we cannot be surprised that societies influenced by Christianity tend to preference monogamy, while those influenced by Islam tend to embrace polygamy; this cultural difference arises from the differing teachings of Christianity and Islam on marriage.

The World Values Survey (WVS) has shown that sociocultural development of nations correlates with religious beliefs. The WVS's Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map shows that around the world, key values align with religious identities. This map positions nations along two dimensions: traditional versus secular values, and survival versus self-expression values. The distinction between

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023



traditional and secular values is self-explanatory. Survival values emphasise economic and physical security. Self-expression values give high priority to tolerance, the environment and participation in decision making.

These plots correlate strongly with the religious history of nations. For example, Protestant Europe has values high on both dimensions, but Islamic nations have values low on both dimensions.

Religion as the Elephant in the “Grooming Gangs” Room

The public discussion around the identity of perpetrators and victims of grooming gangs has focused on ethnicity, national origin and race. This is reflected in many references to perpetrators as “Asian” or “Pakistani” and to victims as “white”. For example, the 2014 [Jay report](#) stated that “the majority of known perpetrators were of Pakistani heritage”. This was at a time when only around 3% of the borough population was Pakistani.⁵ However, scant attention has been paid to religion, whether in public discussion or official

reports. Many observations have been made in reviews about the inconsistent and patchy data on the ethnicity of perpetrators and their victims, but none of the many reviews and reports has had anything to say about the even more marked lack of data on the religious identities of perpetrators or victims.

Another complicating factor has been the reluctance of authorities to release what limited information they do have access to. When the Home Office [denied a Freedom of Information request by The Independent](#), claiming this would not be in the “public interest”, a petition was signed by more than 100,000 people calling upon the Home Office to release their 2020 review into the characteristics of grooming gangs. The Home Office did subsequently release their report.

A poignant and revealing example of the religious blind spot that plagues public discussion of the UK grooming gangs is an otherwise sympathetic 2020 [Triggernometry interview](#) with Dr Ella Hill, a Rotherham grooming gang survivor, conducted by Francis Foster and Konstantin Kisin. Hill, a Christian, had been abused by a gang of Muslim men of Pakistani background. In the interview, Foster and Kisin were doing all they could to show empathy for Hill. However, when Hill described

⁵ Here I use terms such as “Indian” and “Pakistani” to refer to someone’s ethnic heritage, not their actual nationality.

her abuse as both racially and religiously motivated, Foster and Kisin only reacted to the racial aspect. For example, when Hill commented on the perpetrators' "religious justification for that person [a girl being abused] deserving punishment", Foster responded, "Wow! And so simply they [the police] refused to acknowledge it as a race-based crime." Kisin likewise responded with "the sort of thing you are talking about, based on the way that you describe it is undoubtedly an anti-white or anti-western hate crime." They were hearing Hill on other things, but not on the role religion played in her abuse. The failure of Foster and Kisin to hear Hill on the contribution of religion to her rapes, even while showing her empathy, points to the fact that the religious blind spot goes very deep.

The preference to focus on ethnicity and race rather than religion is clear in Baroness Casey's report, which provides a comprehensive, victim-empathic audit of the state of the grooming gang crisis in the UK today. The audit surveyed many previous reports and individual cases. In the published report, the word "ethnicity" appears 222 times, "Asian" 111 times and "Pakistani" 45 times. In contrast, the word "religion" is mentioned just five times – and only one of these instances refers to a perpetrator's religion: the remaining four mentions are references to victims' religions. There are 19 mentions of "Muslim" in the Casey Review, but only four of these refer to perpetrators' religion. The word "Islam" appears just once.

While many seem to take pains to avoid using the R word, the published Arabic names of perpetrators point to its relevance. There has been a series of high-profile prosecutions of grooming gangs, mainly made up of Pakistani men, including in Aylesbury, Bradford, Burton, Derbyshire, Halifax, Huddersfield, Keighly, Newcastle, Oldham, Oxfordshire, Peterborough, Rochdale, Rotherham and Telford. Where the names of Pakistani perpetrators have been published, they all have Muslim names.⁶ Peter McLoughlin, who compiled a list of grooming gang convictions from 1997

to 2018, found that 87% of those convicted had Muslim names.

Most of the convicted grooming gangs have been entirely composed of Muslim men of Pakistani background, but in a few cases there were one or two non-Muslim gang members from other backgrounds. For example, the Aylesbury and Huddersfield gangs each included a Sikh man, the Peterborough gang included a few Eastern Europeans, and a white man or woman with an English name has been convicted in connection with what were otherwise Pakistani gangs active in Bradford, Rotherham, Halifax and Derbyshire.⁷

There have also been convictions of gangs mainly made up of Muslims from non-Pakistani backgrounds, including two Somali grooming gangs in Bristol, a gang composed mainly of Africans in Banbury which also included an Eastern European, a gang of three Iranians in Chelmsford, a gang of three Syrians and a Kuwaiti in Newcastle, a pair of Turkish men in Somerset, and a gang of 17 men and one woman in Newcastle, which included men from Albanian, Kurdish, Bangladeshi, Indian, Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Pakistani heritage. In the latter Newcastle case, all of the published names are Islamic, with the exception of one Indian, who has a Hindu name. There was also a white woman convicted of procuring girls for the Newcastle gang.

There have also been a handful of grooming gang prosecutions made up entirely of non-Muslim perpetrators: for example, a gang of six from Bolton, a gang of three from Rotherham, a gang of seven from Burton-upon-Trent, a gang of three from Coventry, and a gang of Romanians – four men and one woman – from Dundee. However, all the gangs with ten or more members have been largely made up of Muslim men.

While Pakistani men are over-represented in the grooming gang convictions, the overall proportion of Muslim perpetrators is even greater. These observations point to a prima facie case for data to be collected on perpetrators' religion.

⁶ In the 2021 UK census, only 1% of those professing Pakistani ethnicity followed a religion other than Islam.

⁷ When white women have been convicted, it has been for procuring girls for the gangs.

“Islamophobic”?

There has been a run of articles deploring the public discourse around UK grooming gangs as Islamophobic and racist. For example, Waqas Tufail, writing in the *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, asserted that discourse that presents UK Muslims as a threat is a “current and on-going legacy of colonialism” which marginalises Muslims. In an article published in *Race and Class*, Ella Cockbain and Waqas Tufail claimed this discourse “belongs within a broader tendency to racialise crime in political and popular discourse”.

However, the fear of being labelled Islamophobic has undoubtedly suppressed truth-telling about the grooming gangs. Policy Exchange has published a report on how the accusation of Islamophobia has been used to intimidate those seeking to expose grooming gangs. It has also pointed out that a key individual on the staff of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, which has proposed a contested definition of Islamophobia, played “a prominent, and to many in the town [of Rotherham] deeply unhelpful, part in events around the scandal – leading a boycott of the police in Rotherham for ‘scapegoating’ Muslims.” Shadow equalities minister, Clarie Coutinho has said that any definition of Islamophobia will hinder police work around grooming gangs, and give impunity to perpetrators (see here and here).

Jacob Jones, the father of a grooming gang victim, reported that when he turned to his church for help and guidance, he was told that his views were politically motivated and Islamophobic. He approached a journalist who advised him to say nothing about “Muslim gang rapists” because the press would “dig into your personal life and project back distorted stories and lies to discredit you”. He expressed fears that telling his story will put him in prison. Jones lamented:

Imagine your only child has been violated in the most violent and sadistic way and the police, politicians, church leaders, friends, journalists and King are preaching and legislating to silence you into submission and to just accept the rape of our children as a price to be paid for the modern constructs of multiculturalism and social cohesion.

Problems with the “Asian” Label

The label “Asian” has often been used in connection with the UK grooming gangs. This language obscures the fact that there are very large non-Muslim Asian communities in the UK – including Hindus, Christians and Sikhs – who, with rare exceptions, have not been connected to the grooming gang epidemic,⁸ except as victims.⁹ The Indian community in the UK expressed outrage when Prime Minister Keir Starmer referred in January 2025 to “Asian grooming gangs”. Krishna Bhan, chair of the Hindu Council UK, said, “We are dismayed that the PM chose to whitewash this heinous atrocity with the word ‘Asian’ ... Our Hindu and Sikh girls were also their victims. ... Politicians seem to be protecting the perpetrators rather than the victims.”

Even though Pakistanis make up only 29% and Muslims 46% of those who identified as Asian in the 2021 UK census, there have been no reports of non-Pakistani or non-Muslim Asian grooming gangs – no Indian, Chinese, Christian, Sikh or Hindu gangs. Very few non-Muslim South Asian individuals have been prosecuted for grooming gang offences, and those that have were involved with gangs dominated by Muslim men.

Trevor Phillips, writing for *The Telegraph* in 2017, said:

Labelling this phenomenon an “Asian” crime is ... an evasion. It also insults the largest single ethnic minority group in the UK – Hindu Indians – who consider themselves Asian, and the many East Asians who have made the UK their home. Neither group has been even remotely associated with these crimes. What the perpetrators have in common is their proclaimed faith. They are Muslims, and many of them would claim to be practising. It is not Islamophobic to point this out ...

⁸ Peter McLoughlin makes the same point in “Easy Meat”, p. 226.

⁹ *Sikh Youth UK* reported that it has dealt with “thousands of cases of Sikh victims ... We have rescued Sikh girls exploited and neglected in the care system who have been groomed by these gangs.”

The Religious Element in Grooming Gang Abuse

Let us consider the testimony of Rotherham grooming gang survivor Dr Ella Hill concerning the role of religion in her experience of abuse.

Her family responded to the repeated refusal of the police to prosecute her rapists by changing their name and moving to another part of the country, where Ella was able to finish school and go on to complete a medical degree. She has reflected deeply about what happened to her, and has shown unusual courage in sharing her reflections. The following account of Ella Hill's understandings is based on a [testimony submitted to the 2022 Jay inquiry](#), a [Triggernometry interview](#) in July 2020, and a 2018 article for [The Independent](#).

Ella Hill reported that her rape was racially and religiously aggravated: she was raped because of her race and her religion. Her rapists told her while she was being raped that this was happening because she was white and because she was a Christian.

She described how she was trafficked to a group of Muslims by a Pakistani Muslim boyfriend. She would be taken to houses and flats to be raped, beaten and tortured. She tried to move and hide, but her perpetrator found her, broke into her house and attempted to kill her: she reported that her "boyfriend" tried to kill her five times. She survived with multiple lacerations and bruises. She approached the police at least five times with medical evidence, but she reported that they said, "There is nothing we can do" and refused to take evidence.

Ella Hill explained that the abuse was racially aggravated. While she was being beaten, she would be called "a white slag, a white whore, a white cunt", over and over again. At the same time, she was also being verbally abused for being a non-Muslim. Her abusers told her she deserved to be punished because of both her race and her religion. In accordance with what she called "Grooming Gang Ideology", her abusers believed that "the crimes they carry out are justified by their religious beliefs".

Fuller details of Ella Hill's testimony concerning the religious aspects of her abuse were included in Associate Professor Lisa Oakley's submission to the 2022 Jay Inquiry. Ella Hill stated:

I'm a Rotherham Grooming Gang Survivor and I think it's important for civilised society to counter "Grooming Gang Ideology", in order to prevent more Muslim boys being drawn into grooming gang crime. This is why I talk about the religious justifications that were used to drive and to justify the crimes against me. Firstly, I think it's important to acknowledge that not all Muslims share these beliefs, or support the practices of grooming gang criminals. However, I do believe that many of these attitudes and beliefs are endemic in some Muslim populations in areas of the UK and beyond. And I believe that allowing these beliefs to be taught to young Muslims is allowing a form of religious abuse of Muslims themselves, who will almost certainly have unhealthy relationships as a result of it. I have outlined some of the beliefs that I was taught, and that many other survivors I have spoken to experienced too. I have tried to phrase the sentences exactly as they were spoken to me ...

I was told that I must respect their religion. This was the first of many confusing lies that I was forced to believe. I was told that to show them (Muslims) respect, I mustn't eat pork. I was told that Muslim girls are good and pure, and stay virgins until marriage, but all white girls are slags, and they all sleep with hundreds of people. I was told white girls are trash. They are all whores. They are lower than shit under your shoe. They don't obey Allah, so they deserve to be punished. They don't dress modestly. Muslim women are pure because they cover down to their ankles, and down to their wrists, and the hem of their top comes down below their knees. White girls show the curves of their body, so they are asking for it. They should be raped as punishment for not obeying Allah. Kaffir [non-Muslim] girls

are worthless. Sex with a kaffir girl doesn't count as adultery (only sex with a Muslim woman counts as adultery). If you're not a virgin before marriage you should be beaten. Many times I was told that the Quran says, "If one of your wives disobeys you, beat her." This was often quoted to me before they beat me with their hands.

They believed they had a position of religious moral superiority over "non-believers". They believed it was their duty to punish us, as they believed that doing so made them good Muslims. This is what they were taught by their mothers. They were taught that witches in Pakistan are blonde, so blondes are more evil, and they deserve worse punishment. I was told that in Islam, if a girl or woman looks at a man who isn't her brother, father or her husband, then that means she wants to have sex with him. So I was told to look at the floor when I was around Muslim men. So when I did look at a waiter in a restaurant, I was then taken away to be gang raped as "punishment". I was told that according to their faith community, girls are old enough for sex when they start their periods (at age 11). Many of us had to endure the sexual act of 'thighing' [Arabic *mufākhadhah*] which I'm now told is a religiously-sanctioned way of molesting children according to some Islamic scriptures. (You have to lie down on your back with your legs straight together, and they straddle you and fuck between your thighs).

I was beaten, strangled, suffocated, and my head held under water, tortured, kicked, and raped over 100 times. I was told that if you don't scream when you're raped, then you're consenting to the rape, so you should be stoned to death. I was told that Muslim girls know this (because the Quran says that Aisha's silence was her consent to

the marriage to Mohammed).¹⁰ So Muslim girls know to scream, but white girls don't, so that's their fault then, because they're not Muslim. When I did wear a headscarf to try to protect myself from being raped, I was told to get it off, and they raped me again. (I now know that all these so-called "ways to protect yourself from being raped" are "rape-myths" used to excuse perpetrator's criminal behaviour.)

They threatened to kill my parents if my parents tried to stop me seeing them. I was intimidated with guns, and threatened with body parts being cut off with knives. When I tried to escape I was told that I had offended their honour, so they had to spill my blood. They did this in an honour attack.

All of the sexual abuse that I experienced was linked to spiritual abuse or religious abuse. Religious scriptures were used as tools of control to force me to conform to their will. I was not allowed to question these religious beliefs. They used their religious "moral authority" and self-proclaimed elitism to control me through use of scripture, forced confessions, censorship of decision

10 Note in the logic of Hill's abusers their conflation of consent to sex with consent to marriage. Hill's reference to the Quran is not quite correct. This appears to be a reference not to the Quran, but to various hadiths in which Muhammad stated that a virgin's silence is her consent to a marriage. Some versions of this tradition are attributed to a conversation between Muhammad and 'Ā'ishah; for example, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6946>. None of the hadiths about a virgin's consent makes specific reference to 'Ā'ishah or any other girl; however, other hadiths report that 'Ā'ishah was married to Muhammad by her father, Abu Bakr, when she was six years old and there is no record that 'Ā'ishah gave her consent. Indeed, in a tradition reported by Ibn Sa'd, 'Ā'ishah reported that she was not in the room when her marriage was contracted with Muhammad by her father and she did not even know she had been married to Muhammad until after the event: "The Messenger of Allah married me while I was playing with the girls. I did not know that the Messenger of Allah had married me until my mother took me and made me sit in the room rather than being outside. Then it occurred to me that I was married. I did not ask her and my mother was the one who told me." (Ibn Sa'd 8:43) In another tradition, it is reported that Sahlah bint 'Āṣim was married, in Muhammad's presence, on the day she was born. (Ibn Hajar, *Al-Isābah*, 8:194 #11353). The fact that as a newborn, Sahlah was incapable of giving her consent was apparently not an impediment. Islamic law is based on precedents such as these.

making, requirement of secrecy and silence, isolation, excessive shaming and punishment around sexuality, and requiring unquestioning obedience. I experienced this as a deeply personal, terrifying physical, emotional and spiritual attack. Every time they quoted scripture it was very hard to argue with; to them it was like I was arguing with God. To me it was actually like I was arguing with the devil. They used their so-called “religious moral authority” to do the most horrific, immoral acts imaginable.

Further evidence of the religious dimension is the case of ‘Sarah’, who was supported legally by the Christian Legal Centre. Sarah escaped from a 12-year ordeal after being kidnapped off the street at age 15. During those years she was repeatedly drugged with Valium, beaten and raped. After some time, her abuser showed her a certificate from the mosque and told her they were married. Later he divorced her in accordance with the Islamic sharia, by telling her “I divorce you” three times. She was immediately married to a man she didn’t know in a ceremony conducted by an imam. She was being raped by her new ‘husband’ within minutes of the ceremony being concluded, while the wedding party was still going on in the house below.

Over the years, Sarah was forced to have eight involuntary abortions, including one when she was five months pregnant. When she would visit doctors, her abuser made her wear a hijab and walk five feet behind him. Sarah reports that she was forced to learn the Koran in Arabic, and only allowed to speak Urdu and Punjabi. She was also forced to clean and cook for the gang who abused her.

Sarah finally managed to escape after many failed attempts. One time after she managed to report her kidnapping to the police, she was interviewed by a Muslim officer who turned off the tape recorder and told her to drop her allegations due to “lack of evidence”. Sarah reported that this officer was subsequently imprisoned for child sex crimes.

In another case, ‘Anna’ was placed in a Bradford children’s home in 2002. She reported that she

was raped and abused from the age of 13 while she was in the home, and forced into an sharia marriage at the age of 15. Her social worker, who bears an Islamic name, Anwar Meah, attended the ceremony and allowed her husband’s parents to foster her after she became pregnant. The parents were paid a fostering allowance by the state. Anna described being kept in a state of “domestic slavery”, “like a maid”, and being repeatedly sexually abused by dozens of men.

Other Sex Crimes in the Lands of Immigration

This article focuses on the UK grooming gang phenomenon. However, this is not the only sex crime that has been linked to Muslim communities.

In the UK, London police reported that there were on average 1,125 sexual assaults a year in London involving unlicensed taxi drivers. Many of these have been Muslim offenders.¹¹

Another type of sex crime linked to UK Muslim communities is marriage trafficking. The UK Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) reported on 801 cases they had handled during 2024 in which girls and women resident in the UK were forced to marry men. Support was provided for 229 of these cases. Of these 280, the six “focus countries” with the highest number of cases in 2023 were Pakistan (45% of cases), Bangladesh (13%), Afghanistan (7%), India (3%), Somalia (3%) and Nigeria (2%). Of these, all but India and Nigeria have almost exclusively Muslim populations. In 2009, Home Office statistics had reported that 90% of victims of forced marriage in the UK were Muslims. However, in recent years, in a pattern of denial reminiscent of the grooming gang crisis, the FMU has refrained from recording data on religion. Their 2023 report opined, mistakenly, that “Forced marriage is not a problem specific to one country, religion or culture. ... The FMU does not record data on religion; no major faith in the UK advocates forced marriage. Freely given consent is a prerequisite of Christian, Hindu,

¹¹ In 2008, a radio presenter, Sam Mason, was sacked by the BBC for requesting a non-Asian driver to transport her 14-year-old daughter

Jewish, Muslim and Sikh marriages.” Although forced marriage is by no means an exclusively Muslim phenomenon, Muslims are over-represented in UK forced marriages, and it is not true that Islam requires a woman’s consent to marry.

In other countries with Muslim migrant populations, there have been various reports of sexual crimes that disproportionately involve Muslim men. For example, in the Netherlands, much media attention has been paid to Moroccan men – all Muslims – known as “lover boys”. They procure Dutch girls, first seducing and then prostituting them in order to live off their earnings. Victims number in the thousands. A report from the Amsterdam-based ChildRight organisation stated in 2001 that around 5,000 “ordinary” Dutch school girls aged 13 or 14 from a “regular home environment” had been lured into prostitution by “lover boys”.¹² The film *Lover Boys* by Julia Rooke has told the story of Ibrahim, a Dutch–Moroccan social worker working with Dutch–Moroccan lover boys and their victims.

In Sweden, a 2021 research paper on “Swedish rape offenders” found that almost half of offenders were born outside of Sweden and among these, immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa were over-represented.

In 2010, a gang of 29 Somalis were charged in Minneapolis for trafficking young girls for sex across three states.

In Australia, a group of nine Lebanese Muslim men were convicted in 2002 of gang raping white girls. An early newspaper report stated that over 60 female victims were known to the police, but the cases that came to court were the rapes of seven girls. One of the perpetrators had authored a message found on his mobile phone seized by the police: “When you are feeling down ... bash a Christian or Catholic and lift up.”

Reports such as these need to be treated with care. As Ayaan Hirsi Ali has noted in an article on Sweden’s migrant rape crisis, there is a “lack of reliable data on almost every aspect of the prob-

lematic relationship between mass migration and sexual violence”. Nevertheless, as she explores in her book *Prey: Immigration, Islam, and the Erosion of Women’s Rights*, there are countless pointers to a religiously aggravated sexual abuse crisis across Europe.

Muslim on non-Muslim Sex Crimes in Islamic Jurisdictions

Another pattern that needs to be considered is sexual violence against non-Muslim minorities in Muslim-majority contexts.

This was on the mind of the Network of Sikh Organisations UK when they wrote to the Home Secretary in January 2025 to protest the way the authorities have been characterising the UK grooming gang perpetrators as “Asian”. They pointed out that Sikh¹³ and Hindu girls have been targeted by Muslim grooming gangs, and implored the Home Secretary to attend to religious drivers in addition to cultural influences, drawing his attention to the “appalling treatment” of non-Muslim girls in Pakistan.¹⁴

To fully understand the reasons why perpetrators target vulnerable girls from all communities, Baroness Louise Casey’s rapid audit must be bold enough to address all factors when it comes to the multiple motivations of these gangs. We need only look at the appalling treatment of girls from minority faiths in Pakistan – where Christian, Hindu and Sikh girls are kidnapped, forced to convert to Islam and married, to get an understanding of the underlying motivations. In 2018, around 1,000 girls in Pakistan’s Sindh province alone suffered this fate. In many cases, perpetrators are granted impunity due to corruption and connivance with local officials.

Home Secretary, we urge you to do the right thing by extending the remit of the rapid audit to include race and religion

12 Carin Tiggeloven, “Child Prostitution in the Netherlands”, Radio Netherlands, 18 Dec 2001 <https://web.archive.org/web/20071211140745/http://www.radionetherlands.nl/currentaffairs/region/netherlands/netherlands011218.html>

13 Concerning Sikh victims, see Chapter 3 of McLoughlin, “Easy Meat”.

14 In 2013, Anil Bhanot of the UK Hindu Council also called for religious drivers to be considered.

as contributing factors in these terrible crimes. We acknowledge there are variety [sic] of factors involved in group-based child sexual exploitation – but we cannot shy away from the irrefutable truth that non-Muslim girls are considered fair game by some perpetrators, by virtue of the fact they are kuffars (a derogatory term for non-Muslims). Until we are honest about this admittedly uncomfortable factor, we will be no further forward in addressing cases which involve racially and religiously motivated targeting of vulnerable girls from all our communities.

There is a longstanding, entrenched pattern in some Muslim-majority nations of religiously aggravated rape, abduction and forced marriage of non-Muslim women by Muslims. This practice has repeatedly been reported in connection with jihad conflicts – for example, ISIS's and Boko Haram's treatment of non-Muslim captives – but it is also rife in some Muslim contexts where jihad is not being pursued.¹⁵

Pakistan

In April 2024, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a [press release](#) entitled “Pakistan: UN experts alarmed by lack of protection for minority girls from forced religious conversions and forced marriage”. It stated that “Christian and Hindu girls remain particularly vulnerable to forced religious conversion, abduction, trafficking, child, early and forced marriage, domestic servitude and sexual violence”.

In 2021, the [BBC reported](#) that as many as 1,000 non-Muslim girls – Christians, Hindus and Sikhs – are abducted each year in Pakistan and forced to convert and marry their abductors. For example, Farah, a 12-year-old Christian, was taken by force from her home in June 2020 by three Muslim men. Her father tried to report what had happened to the police, but they refused to register the incident until three months had passed. Farah was driven to a different location where she was raped, shackled and used as a

household slave. When Farah's father persisted in his complaint, he was told by the police that because Farah had consented to the marriage and conversion to Islam, they were dropping their investigation. Farah also affirmed this in court, but later she explained that her abductor had told her they would kill her, her father, and her brothers and sisters if she didn't comply. Eventually the court ruled that the marriage had not been registered properly, so she was released from it. Saved by a technicality, she was returned to her family.

In Pakistan, a typical pattern is that a girl is abducted, forced to sign a conversion certificate and quickly married to a Muslim. It is reported that the police often support the abductors against the girl's family. If parents do take the matter to court, judges normally rule that the girls' conversion was legitimate. A birth certificate may be [falsified](#) to pretend that the girl is not a minor. The abductor refuses to bring the girl to the court. Instead, the judge rules based on the testimony of the Muslim “guardian” – the husband – acting on his “wife's” behalf. Once the conversion and marriage have taken place, under Islamic law the husband has the right in Islam to speak on behalf of his wife and communicate her wishes. He becomes her legal guardian. She is blocked from contacting her family. Once a non-Muslim girl has converted to Islam her parents have no more authority over her. This is because in Islamic law a non-Muslim cannot have legal guardianship over a Muslim, even if the Muslim is their own child.

Even if the marriage is annulled – for example, because the girl is under-age – the forced conversion is still valid, which can mean she cannot be returned to her parents' care and can only marry a Muslim.

In case the abducted woman is already married, the majority of Islamic scholars have held that that when a married non-Muslim woman converts to Islam, her previous marriage is thereby annulled. ([For example, see this discussion.](#)) This means that her abductor can legally marry her without the need for any further divorce process.

¹⁵ This was discussed in a [June 2025 Congressional Briefing](#) and a [presentation](#) the next day at Coptic Solidarity's 13th Annual Conference in Washington DC.

Egypt

Two reports on abductions of Christian women by Muslims in Egypt were produced in 2009 and 2012 for the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights and Christian Solidarity International, written by women's rights activists Nadia Ghaly and Michele Clark. A more recent report by Sonja Dahlmans is Hidden Crimes, Public Deception: The Epidemic of the Disappearance of Coptic Girls and Women in Egypt. Coptic Solidarity says this practice is "widespread and highly sophisticated".

One parish priest informed the authors of the Ghaly and Clark reports that he knew of 50 instances of abductions in his parish. A typical pattern is that a young Christian woman is enticed into a friendship with a Muslim, who may be with a female school friend, a peer or older woman, or a boyfriend. This begins as a trusting relationship, but at some point the young woman is abducted or disappears, leading to marriage to a Muslim man, conversion to Islam and separation from her family. Here are Ghaly and Clark's accounts of two typical cases:

Helen was befriended by a Muslim girl in her neighbourhood who introduced her to her brother. The brother subsequently raped her. Out of shame and fear to return to her family, Helen was persuaded to marry her rapist and convert to Islam.

R. was befriended by a Muslim girl in her neighbourhood who introduced her to a Muslim man who began to court her. One day she went shopping with his sister. She was drugged and abducted.

Often, the most vulnerable girls and women are targeted. What may begin with the appearance of friendship or romance ends with loss of identity, forced conversion, coercive control and isolation from former relatives and friends. If the girl or woman does manage to escape, it will also be illegal for her to marry a Christian, because she is considered to be a Muslim. Sharia law bans conversion to Christianity and prohibits a Muslim woman – for such the state considers her to be – from marrying a Christian man.

When Coptic girls are converted to Islam, the tattoo of a cross that most Copts wear on their wrists will be surgically removed or burned off with acid.

Ahmed Awany Shalakamy, an Egyptian convert to Christianity, testified that Saudi backers were funding the enforced conversion of Christian girls in Egypt. Half the money would go to the man who lured her to convert, and the other half would go to the police and other collaborating organisations. More money was given if the girl was from a prominent Christian family or a clergy family. He stated:

We were focused on converting Christian girls and women because we believed this was a greater form of humiliation for Christians. In the East, a man's honor is in his daughter, sister or wife and so disgracing any of them is the ultimate humiliation for him.

In his testimony, Shalakamy reported the stories of the nine women he seduced into Islam, and his efforts to rescue them after he became a Christian.

The Influence of Law and Theology

The Islamic Sharia's Influence

To this point, I have considered the fact that that evidence of a Muslim background has been a recurring feature of UK grooming gang convictions. This, combined with patterns of other sex crimes, both in the lands of immigration and in Muslim-majority contexts, provides prima facie evidence that the religion of Islam could be influencing the UK grooming gang epidemic.

Although no-one should be surprised by the idea that a religion can play a role in regulating human sexuality, the idea that Islam could be a driver of sex crimes is an unpalatable topic. There is a risk of negatively stereotyping all Muslims because of the crimes of a few. Nevertheless, an Islamic influence upon UK grooming gang crimes cannot be rejected out of hand: it is a possibility strongly suggested by the available evidence, which deserves careful consideration.

I will now turn to the question of how Islam could have contributed to the phenomenon of some Muslims raping and trafficking non-Muslim girls. Here it is important to distinguish between Islam the religion and the cultures that have been shaped by Islam but are not necessarily directly determined by it. The historian Marshall Hodgson coined the term “Islamicate” in *The Venture of Islam* to refer to societal characteristics influenced by Islam, but not directly determined by or necessarily consistent with Islamic law and doctrine. Examples are excessive weight gain during the fasting month of Ramadan and the vitamin D deficiency suffered by veiled Muslim women due to their lack of exposure to sunshine.

It must be emphasised that some of the prevalent patterns of sexual abuse in UK grooming gangs are, strictly speaking, forbidden by the Islamic sharia. For example, if it were just an issue of Islamic law, the passing around of women for sex by a group of men would be forbidden, as it falls into the category of *zinā* ‘illicit sex’. According to the Islamic sharia, *zinā* is a serious sin, punishable by either whipping with 100 stripes for an offender who has not yet married or stoning to death for an offender who is or has been married. It makes no difference whether the person with whom a Muslim has sex is a Muslim or an infidel: *zinā* is still forbidden.

It seems that at least some grooming gangs develop what Andrew Norfolk has called a “distorted sort-of street Islam perspective ... within a criminal subculture of the Pakistani Muslim community”. This is not orthodox sharia rigorously applied, but a convenient homemade version of Islam that enables their criminality.

Oxford-educated Muslim scholar Taj Hargey, of the Oxford Institute for British Islam, has called this homemade Islam “theological populism”, which he reports is being influenced by fundamentalist imams. He has called upon the UK authorities to:

... fearlessly delve into the ideology that perpetuates the noxious “them and us” mindset within these grooming cabals. This serves to legitimise the rape of “immoral” infidel (kafir) women. Such pernicious separatist and supremacist

propaganda is aggravated by a prejudiced Muslim clergy.

While aspects of reported patterns of sexual abuse of non-Muslim girls by grooming gangs are against Islamic law, it is argued here that the Islamicate, potentially fuelled by radical clerics, works to condone, enable and incite these rapes.

The influence of any religion on the behaviour of individuals is not just the direct result of an individual’s choices. Much of it is mediated by culture. Over time, a religion can transform a culture. However, not all Islamic cultures are affected by Islam in the same way or to the same extent. A majority Muslim culture can be different from a minority Muslim culture. For example, convictions of Indian Muslim men for grooming gang assaults have been rare compared with Pakistani Muslim convictions. This could be because Muslims in India are in a minority position, constituting only around 14% of the Indian population while Hindus are 80%. Unlike India, where Muslims are a tolerated minority, Pakistan is completely dominated by Muslims and non-Muslims are a tiny, oppressed minority. This means that it is much easier for a Muslim in Pakistan to take advantage of their non-Muslim neighbour than it would be for a Muslim in India.

It is proposed that the influence of Islam on cultural patterns of sexual abuse of non-Muslim girls involves at least eight aspects. These are: the doctrine of Muslim superiority; the doctrine of loyalty and disavowal; superiority and dominance of men over women; enforced seclusion of women by men; forced marriage combined with the lack of an age of consent; female sexuality seen as dangerous; the sharia institution of slavery; and dhimmitude.

I will now consider these aspects, which are framed in terms of Islamic theology and law. But first it needs to be pointed out that pure sharia is practised nowhere in the world. These eight aspects define Islamic ideals, which are not necessarily realised as Islamic practices. Nations that do accommodate sharia principles in their laws often apply modifications that moderate the impact of the sharia upon women. Examples of these are the imposition of a minimum age for marriage; requiring that divorce can only be

enacted through a civil court; granting women enhanced custody rights over their children after divorce, more than the sharia allows; and requiring women to give explicit consent to marry.

Despite such local adjustments and the diverse expressions of Islam, the Islamic sharia deeply impacts Muslim cultures and the laws of Muslim-majority nations. It is also noteworthy that after a period of liberalisation in the twentieth century, the global Islamic revival has seen many countries revise their laws to make them more sharia-compliant: examples are Malaysia and Pakistan. This means that in some Islamic jurisdictions the influence of Islam on the justice system has been increasing, not decreasing.

A. The Doctrine of Muslim Superiority

Islam teaches that righteous, god-fearing people are superior to disbelievers who reject God's requirements: in other words, Muslims are superior to non-Muslims. The quranic verse 3:110 summarises this as follows:

You [Muslims] are the best nation, raised up for humankind, commanding what is good and forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the people of the book [i.e. Christians and Jews] believed, it would be better for them; some among them are believers, but most are perverted. (Sura 3:110)

This verse teaches that Muslims have a divinely granted responsibility to “command” and “forbid”. This can be interpreted as a mandate to correct, compel or punish non-Muslims, if necessary using force.

Quranic verses assert Islam's supremacy over other religions; for example:

It is He [Allah] who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth [Islam], to make it triumph over every religion. (Sura 48:28)

Other verses assert the inferior state of non-Muslims who reject Islam, calling them “the worst of animals”:

Surely the worst of animals in Allah's sight are rejectors [of Islam]; they do not believe. (Sura 8:55)

The doctrine of Muslim superiority goes hand in hand with negative stereotypes of non-Muslims. For example, Sura 9:28 declares that “associators”,¹⁶ a derogatory term for non-Muslims including Christians and Jews, are “unclean” (*najis*).

Such Islamic teachings can supply a theological reinforcement for an abuser's sense of their own superiority, and enable an abuser's dehumanising of their non-Muslim victim.

In her *Triggernometry* interview, Ella Hill reported abusive words and practices during her abuse that reflected an attitude of superiority. For example, she was forced to bend down and kiss her perpetrator's feet to emphasise her inferiority. She reported that another Rotherham victim, when raped by dozens of men, was forced to lick their feet clean: “they believed they were morally superior to her”. Hill commented, “It's a Muslim superiority thing: they believe they have maximum moral authority to command the people beneath them to lick their feet.” She also reported that in the eyes of her rapists, non-Muslim patterns of behaviour marked them as dirty: “If you're eating pork you're unclean, you're dirty. If you use a knife and fork you're dirty; if you don't eat your food with your hands.”

B. The Doctrine of Loyalty and Disavowal: A “Them and Us” Mindset

The Islamic doctrine of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* ‘loyalty and disavowal’¹⁷ instructs Muslims to love and hate for the sake of God. It means loving and supporting all that is pleasing to God, and hating, refraining from and disassociating oneself from all that is displeasing to God. Commentaries that expound this doctrine refer to quranic verses such as:

¹⁶ In Islam, an “associator” is someone who attributes sovereignty or attributes of deity to anyone or anything other than Allah. Christians are considered to be “associators” because they consider Jesus to be both God and the Son of God.

¹⁷ The Arabic *barā'* is usually translated ‘disavowal’, but ‘disassociation’ is more accurate.

Let not the believers take the disbelievers as allies, rather than of believers – whoever does that has nothing from God – unless you guard yourselves as a precaution. (Sura 3:28)

You who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are allies of each other. Whoever of you takes them as allies is already one of them. Surely God does not guide the people who are evil doers [i.e. non-Muslims]. Yet you see those in whose hearts is a sickness – they are quick [to turn] to them. ... Whoever takes God as an ally, and His Messenger [Muhammad], and those who believe [Muslims] – surely the party of God, they are the victors. (Sura 5:51–52, 56)

There was a good example for you in Abraham, and those who were with him, when they said to their people, “Surely we are quit of you and what you serve instead of God. We repudiate you, and between us and you enmity has appeared, and hatred forever, until you believe in God alone.” (Sura 60:4)

This doctrine requires Muslims to love and associate themselves with the Muslim community while holding themselves apart from non-Muslims and hating them. The Quran teaches that God rejects non-Muslims and that those Muslims who associate with non-Muslims, befriend them or make alliances with them will be treated by God as disbelievers and rejectors of Islam. A leading Saudi cleric, Shaykh Sālih al-Fawzān, has taught that Muslims should “regard disbelievers as enemies, hate them and disavow [reject] them”. Although some Muslims reject or reinterpret this doctrine, Islamic revival movements, which – it must be conceded – have made significant inroads across the West, have stressed it, urging Muslims to follow this principle as an essential condition for the Muslim community to be successful in fulfilling its mission.

The doctrine of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* is not just a religious principle. It has also deeply impacted Islamic cultures, with the result that some Muslims can be reluctant to do anything that might reflect badly on the Muslim community

or the reputation of Islam. In an honour–shame culture which embraces the values of loyalty and disavowal, anyone who speaks up to outsiders about abuses committed by Muslims can be treated as traitors.

Here is an example of how this can play out. In her biography, *The Imam's Daughter*, Hannan (now known as Hannah) reported what happened to her as a 14 or 15-year-old Pakistani teenager in the UK after she revealed to a female school teacher that she was being beaten by her father, an imam.¹⁸ Her teacher informed the deputy head, who assigned a male Pakistani Muslim social worker to come to the school to meet with Hannan. At first, Hannan was horrified that he was a Pakistani and too frightened to talk to him. But he was friendly and seemed understanding, so he coaxed out of her that she was being used like a domestic servant, that she was afraid she would be forced into an arranged marriage, and that she was being beaten. That afternoon, Hannan arrived home to find the social worker talking with her father, telling him what Hannan had said. Her father put on a kindly face while the social worker was present, but as soon as he had gone, Hannan's father brutally beat and raped her. He threatened to kill her if she ever told anyone else and locked her in the cellar for days. When Hannan later came across the social worker at school, he wanted to reconnect with her. When she refused to have anything more to do with him, he reportedly said, “Hey, I was just doing what I thought was right – you know that. It's not right to betray your community.”¹⁹

Hannan's experience is similar to those of grooming gang victims who have reported encountering Muslim police officers when they tried to register a complaint, such as Sarah's account of the Muslim police officer who turned off the tape recorder during her interview and told her to drop her charges because of “lack of evidence”.

A culture of enforced loyalty has the potential to cause people to be reluctant to report or give evidence against others from their own community. If Hannan's social worker had

18 Hannah Shah. 2010. *The Imam's Daughter: My Desperate Flight to Freedom*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

19 Hannah Shah. *The Imam's Daughter*, p. 160

reported the matter to the police and her father had been charged with a crime as a result, then the social worker would have put himself and those connected with him at risk of being branded as a traitor by the community.

The influential Indian–Pakistani Muslim scholar and activist, Abul A'la Maududi, argued in his manifesto of the Islamic revival, *Let Us Be Muslims*, that Muslims will never be successful until their supreme loyalty is to God and the Muslim community. The principle of loyalty and disavowal can be all the more influential when Muslims form a minority in lands of immigration. In trying to establish a distinct identity, Muslims can emphasise communal loyalty and separation from infidels even more than in their country of origin.

C. Superiority and Dominance of Men over Women

The quranic verse Sura 4:34 declares that men are the managers or maintainers (*qawwāmūn*) of women: the concept is of keeping something in its right state. In Islamic law, every woman is considered to be under the guardianship of a male, her *walī*. The default is that this will be her father. If the father cannot fulfil this function because he has died or has been disqualified – for example, by losing his sanity or leaving Islam – there is a hierarchy of male blood relatives in the male line who may serve as her guardian instead, beginning with her paternal grandfather and continuing to her sons, brothers, nephews and uncles.

In Islam, when a woman is married, the transaction requires the consent of her *walī*. Once the marriage is contracted, supervision of the woman passes to her husband. Sura 4:34 also gives permission for men to discipline their wives by hitting them.

There are many canonical sources and sharia rules that entrench the doctrine of the inferiority of women. Sura 2:228 states that men are ranked above women. Muhammad declared that women are deficient in religion and intelligence compared to men. In the same hadith, he said that women outnumber men in hell. If a woman or a dog passes in front of a man while he is praying, his prayer is annulled. (In mosques men pray with their backs to women, which avoids this.) The

sharia stipulates that the wife of a Muslim man must have sex with him whenever he asks for it. Muhammad said if she refuses, the angels will curse her until morning.

The sharia laws of divorce favour men, allowing a man to easily divorce his wife with no cause by saying “I divorce you” three times; by contrast, it can be very difficult for a Muslim woman to secure a divorce, requiring a legal process and a financial penalty. After divorce, a mother can have custody of the children up to a certain age, but the father remains the legal guardian of the children. Furthermore, if a woman remarries, she can no longer have the children from her former marriage living with her.²⁰

The sharia laws of evidence also downgrade women, as their testimony is worth half that of a man.

The laws of inheritance generally give women half the inheritance of men (a son's share of an estate is double a daughter's). The wife or wives of the deceased jointly inherit a one-quarter share of their husband's estate when he has no child to inherit, and one-eighth if he has a child. In contrast, a husband inherits half of his wife's estate if she has no child to inherit, and a quarter if she has a child to inherit.²¹

The sharia's treatment of rape also discriminates against women. It treats rape as a form of illicit sex (*zinā*), a category that includes adultery and fornication. In the sharia, *zinā* is understood as sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who is neither his wife nor his slave. There is no separate crime of rape, which is treated as forced *zinā*. (The sharia has no concept of marital rape.) The sharia's punishment for a rapist is the same as for consensual extramarital sex: 100 lashes for someone who has not yet been married or death by stoning for someone who is or has been married. If a complaint of rape is made against a man, the woman's consent is assumed unless both the rape and the woman's lack of consent can be

²⁰ This is because her new husband, as the one responsible for her, would also be responsible for her children, which is unacceptable in Islamic law because a guardian can only be a blood relative.

²¹ Islamic laws of inheritance are complex and disputed, not least by Muslim women.

established on the basis of four male witnesses who each observed the man's penis enter the woman's vagina. (Of course, if there were four men present to witness a rape, and at the time they did nothing to prevent it, they would be most unlikely to give testimony on the victim's behalf.)

If a woman makes an accusation of rape and cannot provide the required four male witnesses, she can be treated as having confessed to the crime of *zinā*. In 2003, the National Commission on the Status of Women in Pakistan reported that as many as 88% of women jailed in Pakistan are victims of rape or gang rape who were unable to provide the required evidence of four male witnesses and were consequently convicted of self-confessed illicit sex. A Norwegian woman, Marte Deborah Dalelv, reported a rape to the police in Dubai. Lacking four male witnesses, she was convicted in 2013 of *zinā* and sentenced to serve a 16-month prison sentence. Under international pressure, Dubai's ruler later pardoned her, and she was allowed to leave the country.

The overall impact of sharia provisions that entrench the dominance of men over women should not be underestimated. Islamised cultures can raise boys to become grown men who expect to control the women in their lives, secure in the knowledge of their superiority.

D. Enforced Seclusion of Women by Men

Islamic law, in various ways, legislates for the covering and seclusion of women. The requirement that a Muslim woman cover most of her body in public is well known. The sharia also gives the authority to a male guardian to limit a girl or woman's movements: a wife or daughter can be confined to the home and only permitted to leave the home in the presence of a male relative for a legitimate reason.

Sura 33:33 says to women, "Stay in your houses and do not flaunt yourselves." Sheikh Assim Al Hakeem explained this verse as follows: "Usually the man's place is out of the home and the woman's place is inside the home."

In 2009, the International Fiqh Academy, a global juristic body set up by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, issued a fatwa on "domestic violence" in which it upheld not only the right of

a Muslim husband to discipline his wife by hitting her, but also the right of *iḥṣān* 'fortification, preservation' of the wife. The root of this word, *ḥ-ṣ-n* is used to form words referring to forts and fortification. A woman is *muḥaṣṣan* 'fortressed' once she marries, which means that men other than her husband cannot approach her. The IFA fatwa declared that the right of *iḥṣān* "is not considered violence" from an Islamic perspective.

One of the implications of the culture of covering and seclusion generated by the sharia is that if a woman is not covered in public and not secluded in her home, a cultural prejudice can arise that, as she is unguarded, she must be sexually available and promiscuous. The idea that an uncovered woman may be molested is implied by Sura 33:59 of the Quran in which Muhammad is told that his wives and daughters should cover themselves so they are "not abused".

Some Islamic preachers have reinforced this perception. For example, after high-profile convictions of Lebanese background Muslim rapists in Sydney, Australia's Grand Mufti, Sheikh Taj Aldin al-Hilali, infamously blamed girls for not being covered up in Islamic clothing, and not being secluded in their homes:

If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside ... without cover, and the cats come to eat it ... whose fault is it, the cats' or the uncovered meat's? The uncovered meat is the problem. If she was in her room, in her home, in her hijab, no problem would have occurred.

His distinct mention of the home and the hijab reflects the sharia: a woman can be uncovered in her home but in public she must be covered.

Sheikh al-Hilali was upholding Islam as the solution to the kinds of crimes grooming gangs have been committing: if people just become Muslims and follow Islamic norms, their girls and women will no longer be subject to such abuses because they will be secluded, kept under constant male supervision and invisible to outsiders.

E. Forced Marriage and the Age of Consent

In the sharia, a marriage is a contract between two men: the groom and the bride's male guardian (her *walī*). The structure of the marriage contract matches a contract of sale. An amount of money, the *mahr*, is paid by the groom to the bride, in return for which she makes herself sexually available to him. A Shafi'i sharia manual, *The Reliance of the Traveler*²² (m8.56), states that "her ownership of it [the *mahr*] is finalised when her husband has sexual intercourse with her", and "the bride may refuse to have sexual intercourse until her husband gives her the marriage payment".

There is no minimum age in Islamic jurisprudence for a girl or woman to be married. Islamic authorities allow that her father can marry her to someone when she is still an infant. Muhammad himself married 'Ā'ishah when she was six – a marriage that was arranged between Muhammad and her father – and consummated the marriage when she was nine. The Quran even provides conditions for the remarriage of a divorced girl who has not yet had her first period (Sura 65:4).

The sharia rules for marriage make a distinction between different types of guardians. The father or paternal grandfather of the bride is known as a *walī mujbir* 'forcing guardian' because, according to some schools of Islamic law, he can compel a virgin daughter or granddaughter to marry even if she gives no consent. Muhammad stated that a virgin girl gives consent by her silence. The root *j-b-r* of the word *mujbir* implies the application of restorative, therapeutic force – for example, in setting a bone. The right of a father or paternal grandfather to compel a virgin daughter's marriage parallels Allah's sovereign role as the one who compels humanity. (One of the 99 names of Allah is *al-Jabbār* 'the Compeller': see Sura 59:23.)

The concept that a girl must reach a specific age before she can give consent to sex is alien to Islam. In Islam, the only lawful consent a woman can give to having sex is her consent

to marry and, as we have seen, even that it not always required.

It is telling that the Arabic word *nikāḥ* means both 'marriage' and 'sexual intercourse'. Islamic law in a sense conflates these two. If a woman is unmarried it is unlawful for her to have sex, and if she is married then according to the sharia she has no right to refuse sex with her husband. Further, there are hadiths that say a virgin's silence is her consent to marriage. The conflation of consent to sex and consent to marriage helps us understand Ella Hill's report that on the basis of these hadiths her rapists regarded their victims' silence as consent to being raped.

However, Islamic scholars hold differing views on the level of physical or emotional maturity required of a married girl for sexual intercourse to take place. Some authorities assert that the onset of puberty is a test of such maturity – although Muhammad had intercourse with his nine-year-old wife 'Ā'ishah despite her being prepubescent – and some allow 'thighing' a wife who is having her period or is too young for vaginal sex, a practice Ella Hill reported.

The point of these reflections is that Muslim grooming gangs may be religiously and culturally indifferent to the concept of an age of consent. An [interview](#) with Andrew Norfolk, a journalist who broke the grooming gang story in the UK, reported that:²³

... although Islam prohibits sex outside marriage, all four schools of Islamic jurisprudence teach that a girl can be married when she reaches puberty, which "on average in Britain is 11".

"When the Muslim Brotherhood Government took power in Egypt, one of the new laws they were going to introduce was to lower the age of consent from 18 to 13, and disappointment was voiced by certain Salafis and Muslim Brotherhood scholars that it wasn't nine."

"Islamic State had nine as the permissible age for marriage. I don't think there's

22 Nuh Ha Mim Keller. 1994. *Reliance of the Traveller: The classical manual of Islamic sacred law ʿUmdat al-Salik* by Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri (d769/1368) in Arabic with facing English text, Commentary, and Appendices. Rev. edn., Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications.

23 The quotes within the block quote are Norfolk's words.

the same sense of wrongness and shame in some cases about having sex with a 12-year-old girl.”

F. Dangerous Women: the Threat of Female Sexuality

Islamic canonical texts assume that women desire sex as much as or more than men and that their sexual desires can be dangerous to men. Muhammad said, “After me I have not left any trial more severe to men than women.” The word *fitna* ‘trial’ here can mean seduction or persecution, leading people away from their faith. The same word is used for chaos which threatens social order.

Muhammad also implied that men are vulnerable to seduction, saying Allah has predetermined a degree of *zinā* ‘illegitimate sex’ for them: “Allah has written for the son of Adam his inevitable share of *zinā* whether he is aware of it or not.”

One symptom of concern about women’s sexuality is the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), which is required or endorsed to varying extents by schools of Islamic law as a means of reducing women’s sexual ardour.²⁴ The Islam Question & Answer website gives as one of the medical reasons for FGM that “Circumcision reduces excessive sexual desire” and “takes away excessive libido from women”. Men apparently do not need their sexual desire to be surgically reduced.

Another indicator of the threat that women’s sexuality poses is the separation of the sexes, manifested in the covering up of women’s bodies, the confinement of women to their homes, and the Quran’s warning to men and women not to look at each other:

Tell the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts, and not show their charms ... (Sura 24:30–31).

²⁴ The Islamic status of FGM is a matter of dispute among contemporary Muslims.

Ella Hill reported how she was subjected to this prohibition on looking at men: “I was told to look at the floor when I was around Muslim men.” She was told that if a woman looks at a man “that means she wants to have sex with him”.

While female sexuality can lead to *fitna*, the sharia ordains that men, who are believed to be more rational and more capable of self-control, have been ordained by God to regulate and control women. Arising from this view is the idea that a woman who is not submissive to sharia requirements – for example, going out and about unveiled on her own – is a threat to social order. There is a view that such a woman is at fault if she is sexually assaulted, and all the more when Islamic ideas of the uncleanness of non-Muslims are part of the mix.

Consistent with this way of thinking, non-Muslim women who do not cover themselves and move about freely without a male guardian may be spoken of as “sluts”, ready and eager to tempt men. In such a culture, Muslim men who have sex with such women are not at fault: it is the woman’s fault.

Victim-blaming is of course not unique to Islam. However, Islamic ideas about the threat of female sexuality and the moral inferiority of non-Muslims can serve to validate this way of thinking.

G. Jihad and Sex Slavery

The Islamic rules of war are detailed, regulating diverse aspects of armed conflict. Some of these rules concern the institution of slavery. In Islamic law, slavery is a by-product of war against infidels. The sharia considers non-Muslim captives to be enslaved by virtue of their capture. They can be distributed to Muslim fighters as part of the spoils of war. Captives may be sold, exchanged for a ransom or kept as slaves. During Muhammad’s lifetime, Muslim armies captured and enslaved women from among their enemies at more than a dozen battles.

In Islamic law, having sex with a female captive-slave is not *zinā*: it is authorised repeatedly by the Quran (e.g. Sura 4:24, 23:6, 70:30), with many precedents in the hadiths. Furthermore, according to Muhammad a married infidel woman who is taken captive in war is automatically

divorced by the fact of being taken captive. This means that if a slave master has sex with a (previously) married female captive, this is not adultery.

It may seem incongruous that the concept of slavery might be linked to the rape of white girls in the UK in the twenty-first century. Yet, Islamic enslavement and sexual exploitation of white women has a long history. It has been estimated that from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, around one million Europeans were captured for the Barbary slave trade. In March 1786, when Thomas Jefferson and John Adams asked Tripoli's ambassador to France why the Barbary states were making war on other nations not hostile to them, Sidi Haji Abdul Rahman reportedly replied:

*It was written in their Koran, that all nations which had not acknowledged the Prophet were sinners, whom it was the right and duty of the faithful to plunder and enslave; and that every mussulman [Muslim] who was slain in this warfare was sure to go to paradise. He said, also, that the man who was the first to board a vessel had one slave over and above his share ...*²⁵

It is striking that the medieval Arabic word for the Slavs, *saqāliba*, came to be used by Muslims to refer to European slaves in general. This is also the origin of the English word “slave”. Furthermore, the term “Caucasian” referring to the white ‘race’ was coined by the German Johann Blumenbach, almost certainly under the influence of the Muslim preference for slaves from the Caucasus, especially Circassian women, who were highly prized for the harem, being considered the most beautiful of women.

Radical Islamic groups such as ISIS have notoriously asserted their right to reintroduce Islamic slavery. A nine-year-old Yazidi girl, Fawzia Sido, was captured in 2014 in Sinjar by ISIS. (Her story was reported by the [Middle East Forum](#).) At first Fawzia was held in captivity with around 200 other Yazidi women and children. After nine months she, together with four other Yazidi girls,

was sold to a man who forcibly converted them to Islam. Fawzia was then given to another man who raped her when she was 10. She described being on sold five more times, including to a Syrian, a Saudi, another Syrian, and finally a Gazan jihadi, Abu Amar al-Makdisi. By then she was 15 or 16 and she bore him two children. When her husband was taken captive by coalition forces, she was smuggled by her husband's family into Turkey, where she was issued with a fake Jordanian passport and taken with her two children to Egypt and on to Gaza. She was rescued from Gaza in 2024 in a joint operation involving the IDF and finally returned to her community in Iraq.

An important legal question, much debated in modern times, is how Muslims should regard Western nations who have received large numbers of Muslim immigrants. In pre-modern times every infidel nation was considered *dār al-ḥarb* ‘the house of war’, from which it was the “right and duty” of Muslims to take slaves, as the Tripoli ambassador put it. In medieval Islamic jurisprudence, *dār al-ḥarb* is the default category for non-Muslim nations, and a doctrine taught by Muhammad states that Muslims who live in *dār al-ḥarb* among infidels have a duty to migrate to a region ruled by Islam, especially if they are not able to practise Islam freely where they are. The duty to migrate is widely taught by Salafi groups (see, for example, [this ruling](#)).

However, legal distinctions have been introduced in contemporary Islam to balance these understandings. Some Islamic authorities consider Western nations to be *dār al-da'wa* ‘house of propagation’, in which the freedom to spread Islam to a nation not previously exposed to the message of Islam relieves Muslims of the duty to wage jihad. Other authorities have considered that a tacit ‘covenant of security’ exists for Muslim migrants, under which they are left free to operate, in return for which no jihad is to be waged.²⁶

²⁵ American Peace Commissioners to John Jay, March 28, 1786. Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651–1827, Library of Congress.

²⁶ Jonathan Birt. 2009. “The Radical Nineties Revisited: Jihadi Discourses in Britain.” In *Dying for Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World*, edited by Madawi Al-Rasheed and Marat Shterin, pp. 105–10. London: I.B. Tauris. However, for some Muslims the idea of a covenant of security has been undermined by their host nations' involvement in wars against Muslims – for example, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is important to note that both of the alternative understandings to the concept of *dār al-ḥarb* only temporarily suspend rather than annul the duty to wage jihad. For at least some radically minded Muslims, the question is not whether but when jihad will be called for.

While it is no doubt the case that many Muslims reject Islam's traditional teachings about jihad warfare and its by-product of slavery, many are aware of Islam's traditional concept of lawful sex with slaves. There are rulings readily available on the internet that condone Islamic sex slavery. See, for example, Islam Q&A's [fatwa](#) on "What is the ruling on intimacy with slave women?" which is reported to have had over 360,000 views.

Some Muslim men, who are by no means experts in Islam, may attempt to justify their abuse of grooming gang victims by framing it in terms of an Islamically legitimate master-slave relationship. In Rotherham, a perpetrator named Muhammad branded his victim with the letter M to show she was his property. Survivors report being forced to cook and clean for their captors like domestic slaves, in addition to being sexually abused.

Andrew Norfolk [described](#) this mentality:

Some of these [Muslim] kids have got an idea – probably because it's quite convenient for them – that Britain's been designated a land of war, so certain things have become permissible in terms of "the enemy"; I think some of these guys think it's okay to do stuff to white girls that they wouldn't dream of doing to Muslim girls.

Such thinking gives a veneer of street Islam legitimacy to perpetrators' criminal acts. Strictly speaking, the Islamic rules of war should not legitimise gang rapes, since according to sharia law, a slave woman can only have sex with her master.

H. Dhimmitude: Islam's Treatment of Conquered Non-Muslim Peoples

Alongside the Islamic rules regulating sexual slavery, we need to consider Islamic rulings on the treatment of conquered non-Muslim nations.

The classical Islamic rules for jihad, understood in Islamic law as warfare against non-Muslims to advance the power of Islam, were established in the medieval period. These laws divided the world into two regions: the house of Islam, where Islam ruled, and the house of war, where non-Muslims ruled. Non-Muslims were thus divided by Islamic law into two groups: those who lived under Islamic rule and were not legitimate objects of war, provided that they met certain conditions; and those who did not live under Islamic rule and were legitimate objects of war. This second group could be fought against and captured as slaves.

In Islamic law, conquered non-Muslim communities are considered to be tolerated under a pact of surrender, known as a *dhimma*. This pact permits non-Muslims living under Islamic rule – known as *dhimmis* – to keep their religion, provided that the men pay an annual financial penalty, known as *jizya*, and the *dhimmi* community abides by various laws that, as the great commentator [Ibn Kathir](#) put it, "ensured their continued humiliation, degradation and disgrace". The *dhimma* covenant is described in Islamic legal texts as an alternative to continued warfare, in accordance with the doctrine of three choices that Muhammad instructed his followers to offer non-Muslims. These three choices were conversion to Islam, surrender under the terms of a *dhimma* pact, or the sword.

When a *dhimmi* community is considered to have broken their pact, by either not paying the tribute or not abiding by the rules of the *dhimma*, the jihad could be restarted, and the sharia laws of war would apply. This means death for the men, enslavement of the women and children, and looting of non-Muslims' property.

There have been many times throughout history when this has happened. For example, the Armenian Genocide was justified by some Muslims on the basis of the Armenians seeking self-determination, which some Muslims saw as a violation of their 'protected' *dhimmi* status. Other notable examples were the massacres of the Jews of Granada in 1066 and the Christians of Damascus in 1860.

The annual payment of the *jizya* tribute and satisfaction of other *dhimma* conditions signified

for *dhimmi* men their annual escape from death. For *dhimmi* women, it signified their protection from enslavement and future rape. So the threat of jihad rape lurks in the background of *dhimmi*-Muslim gender relations. Non-Muslims living under sharia conditions face the constant threat of lawful rape, killing and looting.

Edwin Lane, in his 1871 account of the manners and customs of modern Egypt, reported prayers that Muslims schoolboys recited daily. These included the following supplication concerning non-Muslims:

*O God, make their children orphans and defile their abodes, and cause their feet to slip, and give them and their families and their households and their women and their children and their relations by marriage and their brothers and their friends and their possessions and their race and their wealth and their lands as booty to the Muslims ...*²⁷

This was, in effect, a prayer for the *dhimma*'s protections to fail and for the jihad to restart. It looked forward to non-Muslims' wives and children becoming war "booty" (that is, slaves of Muslims). In effect, it was a prayer for Islamically legitimate killing, rape and looting.

The legal framework of the *dhimma* imposed perpetual insecurity upon Christian communities living under Muslim rule. It has provided a religiously informed cultural frame for the continued kidnapping, forced conversion and marriage of non-Muslim girls in Egypt and Pakistan. This applies alongside and in addition to the legal vulnerability of non-Muslims, whose testimony in a sharia court cannot stand against that of a Muslim; this generates a culture of the discounting of non-Muslims' versions of events. It also applies alongside the other factors listed here, such as the guardianship system, which wrests 'converted' girls out of the care and protection of their non-Muslim parents. The *dhimma* system offers a moral plausibility frame

in which the compounded theological and legal factors can work together to legitimise sexual abuse of non-Muslims.

One of the impacts of the *dhimmi* condition is to inculcate fear in non-Muslim communities. Over centuries of threatened and realised abuse, they can be rendered servile and submissive. One interpretation of the complicity of the authorities in the UK grooming gang crisis is that a kind of *dhimmi* servility has settled into the souls of UK authorities. This respects Islam and Muslims at all costs, while disbelieving and inculpating non-believers. Seen in this light, the authorities' inaction in response to the grooming gang crisis could be considered a milestone in the ongoing Islamisation of the UK.

Concluding Comments on the Influence of Islam

I have been considering the role of Islam in the UK grooming gang phenomenon. I have considered eight aspects of Islamic dogma that potentially contribute to the sexual abuse of non-Muslims by Muslims.

It is important to reiterate that the Islamic principles I have been describing are part theology and part law, the two working together. Islam is not monolithic. The lived experience of Muslims and non-Muslims in regard to these principles is diverse, and often diverges from shariah principles: Muslim nations do tend to apply sharia principles when enacting and applying laws, but they also adapt and amend them. Muslim communities' lives are shaped by these principles, but to varying extents. For example, Muslims in Pakistan live under a more sharia-true, Islamised legal code than Muslims in Indonesia.

Radical Muslim groups everywhere aspire to live in an Islamised society that conforms to the principles laid out above. It was sharia laws of war that a UK protestor invoked in February 2006 at a demonstration against the Jyllands-Posten cartoons depicting Muhammad, when he shouted:

We will take revenge on you! Allahu Akbar! May they [Osama Bin Ladin and Zawahiri] bomb Denmark, so we can invade their country and take their wives as war booty.

²⁷ Edwin William Lane. 1871. *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians: Written in Egypt During the Years 1833-1835*. 5th edn., London: Alexander Gardner, Appendix E, p. 575.

Such a statement may be dismissed as that of an extremist. Nevertheless, there is no Muslim community in the world, extremist or not, that has not been influenced, at least to some extent, by the eight aspects of Islamic theology and law outlined above. These principles have the potential to influence behaviour, even in ways that conflict with Islam's teachings: not all Islamic outcomes are sharia-compliant.

Ella Hill stated in her *Triggernometry* interview:

White girls are seen as easy meat. Muslim girls are very strictly controlled. They [i.e. Muslim boys] are taught that white girls are bad and deserve to be punished.

These judgements arise in an Islamised culture in which non-Muslims are bad by definition – in particular, non-Muslims girls who do not submit to Islamic norms, going outside of their homes uncovered and with no male relative supervising them. Such behaviour is seen as permitting rape as punishment, as a perverted form of commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong (Sura 3:110).

This perspective is echoed by the testimony of Samira Bellil, a French–Algerian woman from a Muslim family who rejected the restrictive seclusion imposed upon Muslim women and chose to dress and conduct herself like a Western young woman. At the age of 13 she became the girlfriend of a 19-year-old man. When her boyfriend boasted about his sexual exploits with her to his gang, she reports, “I was tagged with a reputation as an easy lay”.²⁸ Bellil was violently raped and passed around by young men in her boyfriend's circle. Having stepped out of the Islamic system of control over women, Bellil was marked for punishment and sexual exploitation.

Islamic cultures are not all the same. The over-representation of Pakistanis among the UK gang rapists – in contrast, for example, to Indian and Bangladeshi Muslims – could be a product on the one hand of Pakistan's more Islamised culture and on the other hand of the overwhelming dominance in Pakistan of Muslims over Christian,

Sikh and Hindu fellow citizens. This dominance is reinforced by Pakistani's legal culture, which results in women's prisons being full of victims of rape who have been unable to get justice for the crimes committed against them. It should not be surprising if some migrants from Pakistan to the UK have brought with them an expectation of impunity for rape, enabled by Islamic principles.

The Islamic emphasis on the superiority and dominance of men over women places all women in a vulnerable position, discriminated against in legal processes and with rigorously restricted agency. Islam's answer to the possibility of sexual abuse due to this vulnerability is to insist that men exert a high degree of control over women and girls in their own families. This does not necessarily protect females from sexual abuse within the home, but it can protect them from rape by outsiders. However, non-Muslim cultures do not normally provide such ‘protections’.

I have mentioned Islam's lack of a concept of an age of consent or of a minimum marriage age to emphasise that in sharia law, there is no concept of a girl being too young to be married. The implication is that a girl aged 12–14 (or younger) is not thought of as being too young for sex.

In the light of sharia principles, non-Muslim women are doubly vulnerable. The sharia stipulates that a non-Muslim's testimony is invalid in a sharia court against that of a Muslim. The testimony of a non-Muslim woman is doubly downgraded and discounted: first because she is a woman and second because of her religion. This double disability incites both contempt and abuse.

It seems some Muslim perpetrators have justified their abuse of non-Muslim girls by thinking of it as occurring within a master–slave relationship, which in Islamic law is legitimate under certain conditions.

It is important to reiterate that Muslims' understandings of the sharia are diverse. The provisions of Islam, including the contents of the Quran and the traditions about Muhammad, as well as accepted sharia rulings, do not fully determine Muslims' actual beliefs and behaviours. There is not a simple one-to-one relationship between Islam's traditional teachings and the lived reality

28 Samira Bellil. 2008. *To Hell and Back: The Life of Samira Bellil*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p. 5.

of Muslims' lives. In some cases, the lived reality can seem more moderate than pure sharia. However, it appears that in the 'street Islam' that has been reportedly practised by some UK grooming gangs, the divergence from strict Islam has made non-Muslims even more vulnerable.

Despite this, it can hardly be considered controversial to point out that the religious teachings of Islam have profoundly shaped Muslim cultures. So it is entirely reasonable to explore whether and to what extent Islam's teachings about relationships between men and women, and between Muslims and non-Muslims, do exert a real-world influence on how Muslim people think and act. In doing so, we must not descend to simplistic, unresearched and credulous claims about Islam. For example, the UK Forced Marriage Unit's claim that Islamic marriages require "freely given consent" is mistaken. It is greatly to be regretted that, on the strength of this falsehood, the FMU is not collecting data on the religious identities of trafficked girls and their families.

Beware Deflections

I have proposed here that the UK grooming gang phenomenon has been influenced by Islamic theology and law. I have identified eight aspects of Islamic theology and law that establish conditions conducive to grooming gang abuses. This influence can apply even if the grooming gangs are not acting in strict compliance with Islamic law. They may follow their own version of 'street Islam', which has, nevertheless, been influenced by mainstream perspectives of Islamic theology and law.

On 13 March 2018, Lord Pearson asked a [question in the House of Lords](#) about the Islamic connection of these grooming gangs. Replying on behalf of the government, Lord Young said:

There is nothing in the Koran that encourages the sort of activity the noble Lord has referred to. In any case, the Koran would be trumped by the law of the land. Islam, like all world religions, does not support, advocate or condone child sexual exploitation. Indeed, respect for women is inherent in its faith. As my noble friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon has just

told me, one of Islam's phrases is, "Paradise lies at the feet of the mother".

If only these platitudes were true! But they are both misleading and false.

First, if the authorities will not enforce the law, it hardly matters whether the law of the land trumps the Quran, and in any case, many Muslims reject that idea that secular law trumps sacred law.

Second, the phrase supplied by Lord Ahmad – "Paradise lies at the feet of the mother" – was taken out of context. The phrase is taken from a hadith. Although it is not attested in most hadith collections, it is considered authentic. The full hadith is found in the Book of Jihad (that is, the book of warfare against non-Muslims) within a hadith collection known as *Sunan an-Nasā'i*:

Jahimah came to the Prophet and said: "O Messenger of Allah! I want to go out and fight (in Jihad) and I have come to ask your advice." He [Muhammad] said: "Do you have a mother?" He [Jahimah] said: "Yes." He [Muhammad] said: "Then stay with her, for paradise is beneath her feet."

This hadith is not about respect for women in general. It is a concession allowing a man to say at home rather than fight non-Muslims if he needs to be with his mother. A similar hadith states that a man can stay behind if his parents are still alive, so the principle applies to fathers too. This hadith says nothing at all about child sexual exploitation.

Third, Lord Young is also mistaken to conflate Islam with the Quran. Islam is based not only on the Quran, but also on the life of Muhammad (sira) and the many traditions that recount what Muhammad did and said (hadith). The Quran, the sira and the hadith all condone sexual exploitation of non-Muslim women taken captive in jihad. They condone the idea of a man marrying a pre-pubescent girl. Some schools of Islamic law, based on the sira and the hadith, condone the idea of a man forcing his virgin daughter or granddaughter to marry in exchange for a financial payment. Islamic law recognises no such thing as an age of consent: this too is based on the sira and hadith.

Recommendations

Many different kinds of action are needed to counter and dismantle the UK grooming gangs. Some steps are already being taken or have been promised, such as improvements in policing, but more transparent reporting is needed. Here are some suggestions which arise from the evidence considered above.

1. Fears of stoking Islamophobia should not be allowed to inhibit frank and honest investigation of the grooming gangs' religious culture. To this end, the government must not adopt an official definition of Islamophobia. The authorities need to find ways to acknowledge religious aspects of grooming gang criminality: both the use of Islam to groom victims and the contribution of Islamic theology and law to establish the conditions in which these gangs have formed. As [Ella Hill commented](#), "I experienced horrific, religiously sanctioned sexual violence and torture – so I definitely believe that we need to be aware of religious extremism as something potentially harmful, so that we can protect people from it."
2. The religious identities of perpetrators and victims should be rigorously recorded, tracked and made public. Relevant information includes the version of Islam that perpetrators espouse.
3. Police should be trained to interview grooming gang suspects concerning both their religious beliefs and practices and their attitudes to ethnic differences, with a view to charging perpetrators with religiously and/or racially aggravated sexual assault.
4. Likewise, police should be trained to explore and thoroughly document religious aspects in the testimony of victims.
5. The state should enforce a legal prohibition of unregistered marriages, while also enforcing the ban on polygamy. The 1753 Clandestine Marriages Act banned marriages in England and Wales from being conducted in secret and not registered in a way compliant with the law. This law was passed to protect the rights of women and children. Severe penalties were prescribed for clergy who broke the law. The need for such a law continues to this day. Being a party to an unregistered marriage should be treated as a crime. It is an irony that while some nations require religious marriages to be registered (e.g. India, Malaysia and Turkey), Western nations have abandoned the requirement of registration of religious ceremonies, effectively handing over the regulation of *nikāḥ* marriages to religious authorities. The UK's neglect of registering sharia marriages has sent a powerful message to Muslim communities that Islamic law trumps the law of the land where human sexuality is concerned. It has made the practice of forced marriages and underage marriages easier, including the forcing of grooming gang victims into unregistered sharia marriages. The prevention of unregistered Islamic marriages should be backed by severe penalties for the two male contractors (the *walī* and the groom) and any religious leader who participates in a ceremony, as well as penalties for the two witnesses required by Islamic law if they are aware that the marriage is not registered or could be illegal for some reason, such as the age of the bride.
6. The role of abusers' family members in enabling abuse should be considered. If the abusers think of and treat their victims as slaves, compelling them to clean and cook, it is likely that other family members, including women, receive the benefits of this service, and could potentially be charged with participating in enslaving grooming gang victims.
7. Islamic religious leaders should be called upon to issue statements that Muslim men who have sex with unmarried girls are guilty of *zinā* and incur the wrath of God, and that this applies irrespective of the religion of the girl. They should also be called upon to reject and actively oppose any idea that the UK is the 'house of war' in which jihad is permitted and women treated as slaves. Leaders should also be called upon to reject

underage marriage and forced marriages. Above all, they should insist that Muslims are subject to the laws of the nation, as their duty is both to Islam and to the nation.

8. Politicians should cease making ignorant claims about what Islam does or does not teach. They should avoid the temptation to declare that “all world religions” – as Lord Young put it – teach the same benign doctrines.
9. Public acknowledgement of Islam’s contributions to the grooming gang crisis needs to make clear that there are Muslims who reject key elements of the grooming gangs’ religious culture. Muslims who are good citizens will surely face up to evils done by their co-religionists and will challenge any uses made of their faith for evil purposes. (Likewise, Catholics of good faith have had to acknowledge and reject the epidemic of clergy sexual abuse.)
10. The UK Forced Marriage Unit should remove statements on its website claiming that there is no religious basis to marriage trafficking, and recommence collecting information about the religion of perpetrators and victims. The FMU’s role is not to offer an apology for different religions, but to combat forced marriage, irrespective of whether it is claimed to have religious licence.
11. Awareness training could be provided for white working-class communities and other communities who are targeted by grooming gangs, to help girls and their families recognise the signs of grooming. (Sikh communities in the UK already have such a process in place which could be used as a model.)

Conclusion

The heinous activities of UK grooming gangs have ruined the lives of many thousands of young girls in the UK and done grievous harm to hundreds of thousands of the victims’ friends and family members. This has become a sprawling, festering wound in the soul of the nation.

Despite systemic denial and obfuscation, Islamic theology and practice are implicated in the grooming gang phenomenon. To be sure, more research is needed to help the nation to fully grasp the nature of this religious crisis. However, direct action to address the crisis cannot be delayed.

To process the unpalatable reality behind the grooming gang epidemic, the UK urgently needs to find a language to talk about how religions can impact cultures, both for good and for bad. Public policy has to mature to the point where it can honestly take stock of the deep cultural impacts of religions, both good and bad. It must be acknowledged that when immigrants enter the UK, they do not leave behind their religious beliefs and practices. It must be acknowledged that religions are not all the same and can generate very different cultural conditions.

To achieve all this will also beg the question of what the UK’s biblical legacy has contributed to its culture, and what damage abandoning that legacy might do to the nation’s allegiance to a shared ethical and legal code. Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s wise observations about the biblical foundations of Western democracies provide an informed starting point for understanding what the UK is at risk of losing.

This will be a painful awakening, but if the authorities won’t attend to the cognitive dissonance the nation is suffering by allowing the foundations of their own failing worldviews to be challenged and remade, the UK’s hurting multitudes could be driven to impose a more radical solution.

It has become a matter of great urgency, for the sake of community healing and harmony, that UK civic leaders recognise the religious drivers of the grooming gang crisis, explicitly and publicly acknowledge them, and summon the courage to act. This will not be easy, and it needs to be achieved without ratcheting up inter-group hatreds or inciting religious persecution. However, unless this is done, the same traumas will continue to be imposed upon the nation’s daughters, as these horrific crimes drive an ever-deepening wedge between communities and turn the dream of peaceful multicultural coexistence into a nightmare of trauma and pain.

For now, this crucial question remains open:
Will the UK grooming gang crisis turn out to be
a milestone along the path to the Islamisation of
the UK, or will it be a wake-up call that turns UK
society back to its cultural and spiritual roots?



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