

Gender-based Violence as an Expression of Christian Persecution in Muslim Lands

Lela Gilbert, Adjunct Fellow, US Hudson Institute¹

Introduction

The following overview is a first step toward examining gender-based violence and its relation to Christian persecution in Muslim lands. This is a challenging subject because of several factors: the unavailability of statistical information, the silence of the victims, and the severity of the abuses, which are sometimes lethal. Quantified reports, by and large, do not exist. At the same time, locating and interviewing enough victims to formulate sizable case studies is daunting if not impossible.

Rather than cite possibly dubious statistics from a range of small organizations, our report first exposes cases of *general* gender abuse in four specific Muslim countries: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt. These Muslim states are more closely watched than most others, and a number of human rights organizations, along with government agencies such as the US Department of State, are actively observing them. The evidence such groups provide is trustworthy. Episodically, some cases are even reported in the international media.

Meanwhile, burgeoning Christian persecution of a general nature is fairly well-documented globally by watchdog groups, and information from reliable organizations like Open Doors, International Christian Concern and various Catholic outreaches is accessible online.

Because Christians are perceived as undesirable minorities in Muslim countries, they are subject to extreme persecution, repression and violence. As we will see, all women are traditionally treated as second-class citizens under Islam. However, Christian females are in even worse straits than Muslims, because they are the weakest members of an “infidel,” outcast population. Whatever abuses Muslim women and girls may suffer – and their wounds are many – Christian females’ sufferings are exponentially more intense and life-threatening.

By examining and comparing the treatment of Muslim women and girls under Islam alongside patterns of persecution and violence in Christian communities, we are able to gain a rudimentary understanding of how gender-based violence has become a savage weapon against Christians in Muslim lands.

Part One: What is the general nature of gender relationships in Islamic societies?

A broad look at the circumstances of women in Muslim states reveals several general cultural patterns: a profound absence of equality with men; honor-based family “protection” of women based mistrust regarding their sexuality; widespread domestic violence; rape and murder. In many regions of the Islamic world, female genital mutilation – which in varying degrees prevents females from experiencing sexual pleasure – is pervasively practiced. So are kidnappings and forced marriages of young women, including prepubescent girls, to much older men.

In Muslim majority countries where state laws are based entirely on the Sharia (Islamic law) such as in Iran and Saudi Arabia, women’s lives are entirely dominated and controlled by men, including the state’s religious police. They are subjected to family-arranged polygamous marriages. They are required to cover themselves entirely in traditional clothing and veiling, often in black, and they are not permitted to interact with men unless accompanied by a male chaperone – preferably a family member.

Whether nations and societies operate either formally (through official state enforcement) or informally (through cultural norms that lead either to community enforcement or mob rule) the Sharia, strictly interpreted, enshrines radical misogyny. For example, a brief look at some of Iran’s most basic laws regarding women is instructive. The Women's Forum Against Fundamentalism in Iran (WFAFI) reports the following items in Iran’s legal system:

In Article 18 of passport law, married women require their husband's permission to apply for a passport.

Article 102 of Iran’s Constitution indicates: "Women who appear on streets and in public without the prescribed ‘Islamic Hijab’ will be condemned to 74 strokes of the lash.”

Article 300 of the Penal code states that the "Deyeh" of a Muslim woman is half of the "Deyeh " of a Muslim man. Although some may interpret the law differently, by law the life of a woman has half the value of a man.

Article 105 of the Civil Code declares: "In the relationship between a man and a woman, the man is responsible as head of the family." The Council of Guardians, has decreed, "A woman cannot leave her home without her husband's permission, even to attend her father's funeral".

Article 1133 of the Civil Code states: A man can divorce his wife whenever he so chooses and does not have to give her advance notice. ²

From time to time courageous Iranian women rebel against burdensome male controls. *Bloomberg News* reported in September 2012,

An Iranian cleric said he was beaten by a woman in the northern province of Semnan after giving her a warning for being “badly covered,” the state-

run Mehr news agency reported.

Hojatoleslam Ali Beheshti said he encountered the woman in the street while on his way to the mosque in the town of Shahmirzad, and asked her to cover herself up, to which she replied “you, cover your eyes,” according to Mehr. The cleric repeated his warning, which he said prompted her to insult and push him.

“I fell on my back on the floor,” Beheshti said in the report. “I don’t know what happened after that, all I could feel was the kicks of this woman who was insulting me and attacking me.”³

Generally, Iran’s women are more westernized and outspoken against their repression than, for instance, Egyptian, Pakistani or Iraqi women. In all Sharia-ruled states, however, attempting to make changes in draconian Islamist legal systems can be dangerous and even deadly.

UN special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, said in a report to the UN General Assembly “In two dozen interviews ... human rights defenders reported being arrested and held incommunicado in solitary confinement for periods ranging from several weeks to 36 months, without charge or access to legal counsel,” Shaheed said. “Most of them also reported that they were subjected to severe physical torture during interrogations, which were aimed at coercing confessions or soliciting information about other human rights defenders and human rights organizations...”⁴

Saudi Arabia’s refusal to allow women to drive automobiles has been widely reported. But that is only one well-publicized example of the systematic discrimination against women in the KSA. “Domestic violence and rape are widespread problems, and women have no redress for such crimes. Women cannot travel or be admitted to a hospital without their husbands’ permission. Buses are segregated, and women must sit in the rear. Those women not wearing an *abaya* (a black garment covering the entire body) and covering their faces and hair are harassed by the Mutawwa’in (religious police) and can suffer corporal punishment.”⁵

In other Muslim regions, even without official state enforcement of Sharia, women’s lives are also cheap. Palestinian-Israeli writer Khaled Abu Toameh reports,

“In Pakistan, a 14-year-old girl is shot by Muslim extremists for daring to call for education for women.

“In Tunisia, a young woman who was raped by three policemen is about to go on trial for committing an “indecent act.” Her crime: she was sitting with her fiancé in a car when the policemen surprised them and brutally raped her.

“Syrian refugee girls who fled the fighting in their country are being forced into marriages by Muslim men, who are exploiting the plight of their families to fulfill sexual fantasies.

“In the West Bank city of Hebron, a Muslim woman who decided to run in the local election is being ridiculed and threatened by fundamentalists who insist that she should be only staying at home cooking and looking after her husband and children.

“In the Gaza Strip, women continue to suffer from severe restrictions imposed by Hamas and other fundamentalist groups.”⁶

A November 2012 *Huffington Post* story reported: “A 13-year-old girl who said she had been raped was stoned to death in Somalia after being accused of adultery by Islamic militants, a human rights group said. Dozens of men stoned Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow to death Oct. 27 in a stadium packed with 1,000 spectators in the southern port city of Kismayo, Amnesty International and Somali media reported, citing witnesses. The Islamic militia in charge of Kismayo had accused her of adultery after she reported that three men had raped her, the rights group said.”⁷

Honor killings are rampant. Even in non-Muslim countries there are increasing reports of incidents typified by a father who is enraged by the westernization of one of his daughters and murders her. Although in the US these cases are subject to American law, in some parts of Europe, including Great Britain, there are reports of Sharia courts quietly being given jurisdiction over Islamic enclaves and permitting such atrocities.⁸

Nina Shea writes of honor killing,

“Lest anyone doubt the reality of this global phenomenon, some recent accounts are worth reviewing. Overwhelmingly directed at Muslim women by male relatives and often linked to forced-marriage practices, these murders are ‘widely reported in regions throughout the Middle East and South Asia,’ especially in places that apply sharia, according to Amnesty International. But, as the group is also careful to point out, honor-killing incidents are now being reported in the United States. In the U.K. last December, police recorded at least 2,823 honor attacks for the previous year, with 39 of the 55 police forces reporting. Among the twelve forces that kept records in 2009, there was a 47 percent increase in the number of attacks, according to the BBC.”⁹

Part Two: How do Muslim gender norms affect women in Christian minority groups?

A wide-angle portrait of discrimination and abuse of women in strict Muslim cultures reveals an ideologically-driven mindset. Islam casts women as lesser beings who, to varying degrees, require male guardianship. Female sexuality is generally perceived as a powerful and dangerous force, a predatory threat to male spirituality and family honor – a perilous feminine element that demands stringent supervision and -- because of their lesser value and legal status – leads to grave endangerment to women.

One expert in Islamic history explains, “Muslims often see the woman as the hunter and the man as the passive victim of her ardor; indeed, sexual needs make her the ‘symbol of unreason, disorder, the anti-divine force of nature and disciple of the devil.’ This view may derive from the woman's greater physical capacity for sex or it may go back to Muhammad's experiences. But whatever its origin, female sexuality is thought of as being so powerful that it constitutes a real danger to society.”¹⁰

Nearly all girls and women in Muslim societies live vulnerable lives and are beset by great injustices. But the risks and inequalities faced by Muslim women are magnified exponentially in the lives of Christian women and children. A climate of outspoken and evident discrimination toward Christian minorities seeks to Islamize, intimidate, terrorize, drive out or otherwise neutralize Christian communities, which inspires intensified abuses. These abuses include:

1. Kidnapping and forced marriages, which compel Christian girls to convert to Islam.
2. Honor killings, frequently due to a conversion from Islam to Christianity, presumed “westernization” or the accusation of illicit sex or other “sinful” behavior.
3. Domestic violence, which is commonplace in Muslim households. In the case of a Christian wife (likely a convert from Islam) may be intended to correct “unIslamic” practices such as Christian prayers, Bible reading, attending Bible Study or church.
4. Rape, the causes of which are generally identified as sexual gratification, rage, power and sadism, is also used to deflower young Christian women and force them to marry their Muslim rapists – or be killed.
5. Biased legal judgments in which Christian rape victims are required by law to produce Muslim male witnesses of the incident; the reporting of a rape that cannot be verified by male Muslim eyewitnesses - and few can - means women risk imprisonment or violent death for “adultery.”
6. Physical abuse for Christian girls not covering their heads or otherwise wearing “provocative” clothing in mixed neighborhoods or communities. The consequences of women’s unIslamic dress may include beatings, rapes or having acid thrown in their unveiled faces, which is becoming a common form of assault.

7. Blasphemy accusations – bearing in mind that a woman’s testimony is worth ½ of a man’s and therefore she has no defense. Blasphemy is often the accusation in cases that reflect property disputes, attempted embezzlement, personal vendettas and other unrelated offenses.
8. Marginalization or exploitation of women who are either widowed or left on their own because of their husbands’ imprisonment, disappearance or death.
9. Vulnerability of Christian girls and women, who are especially defenseless because Christian communities tend to be less vindictive and more easily intimidated than their Islamic neighbors; Muslim abusers have what they perceive as free license to mistreat them.

Pakistan has the dubious distinction of being one of the world’s most notorious hotbeds of Christian persecution. Unlike Saudi Arabia and Iran, although it has a decidedly Islamist constitution, its government is not in full control of its population. Like post-Mubarak Egypt, Pakistan either turns a blind eye to Christian persecution, or quietly winks at the thugs who carry it out. Therefore, although technically the state itself is not directly responsible for much of the persecution of Christians that takes place, it is often implicit in it.

Instead of official police enforcement, vigilantes, mobs and random ad hoc militias administer their own versions of Islamist law in brutal and deadly assaults, while the state fails to protect the victims. Sometimes the police take action and arrest the perpetrators. The courts may even find them guilty of criminal violence or even murder, but the offenders are generally quietly released within days, to be welcomed home by cheering throngs of supporters. Meanwhile, once the victims are released from “protective” custody, they – too often accused of “blasphemy” based on Pakistan’s particularly onerous and ill-defined constitutional laws – are subject to beatings, rape and death even after being declared innocent.

Girls in Pakistan seem to be an irresistible target for abuse. In a recent report, Raymond Ibrahim, a Coptic-American writer and Associate Fellow at the Middle East Forum, described 22 cases of brutality against Pakistani Christian girls.¹¹

To cite but a handful of Ibrahim’s cases,

- Gulfam, [a] 9-year-old Christian girl, was raped by a Muslim man. Though not killed, she was left "in shock and in the throes of a physical and psychological trauma." During her ordeal, her rapist told her "not to worry because he had done the same service to other young Christian girls" (December, 2010).¹²
- Lubna, a 12-year-old Christian girl was kidnapped, gang-raped, and murdered by a group of Muslims (October, 2010).¹³
- Kidnapped last Christmas Eve, a 12-year-old Christian girl known as

"Anna" was gang raped for eight months, forcibly converted and then "married" to her Muslim attacker. After she escaped, instead of seeing justice done, "the Christian family is in hiding from the rapists and the police" (October, 2011).¹⁴

- A Muslim man murdered a teenage Christian girl, Amariah, during an attempted rape: he had "grabbed the girl and, under the threat of a gun, tried to drag her away. The young woman resisted, trying to escape the clutches of her attacker, when the man opened fire and killed her instantly, and later tried to conceal the corpse" (December, 2011).¹⁵
- Muslims abducted a 14-year-old Christian girl, Mehek, at gunpoint in broad daylight from her parents' house. One of her abductors declared he would "purify her" by making her "Muslim and my mistress" (August, 2011).¹⁶

These Pakistani cases – specifically having to do with female children – are far from isolated incidents. Instead, they represent the kinds of violence faced by girls and women of all ages who belong to Christian minorities in majority Muslim states. Pakistan is notoriously brutal to be sure. But similar stories are reported throughout the Islamic world.

Although different from Pakistan in its style, Egypt is an increasingly inhospitable place for its Christian minority, primarily comprised of Copts – one of the most ancient Christian communities in the world. Since the Arab uprisings in 2011-12, the historic Coptic Christians (along with a much smaller Evangelical community) have suffered ever-worsening threats and cruelties. There are well over 8 million Christians in Egypt – perhaps even as many as 12 million -- the numbers vary wildly. Copts are far and away the largest Christian population in the Middle East. A study about Coptic women by Christian Solidarity International, titled "Tell My Mother I Miss Her" is useful for further understanding.¹⁷

Since Mubarak's demise, the Muslim Brotherhood and radical Islamist parties have been enjoying their newfound prestige and freedom and are applying more and more pressure on Egypt's Christian community. And since Egypt's reputation for sexual harassment of women is exceptionally vile, the female Christian community is facing far more difficult times than before. All of the pressure isn't immediately deadly, but harassment, bullying and mockery are ever-present. Intimidation is ubiquitous. And eventually, without fail, blood is spilled.

In November 2012, hijab-wearing Egyptian women attacked teenagers with scissors on trains and buses in several incidents, cutting off their hair because they weren't wearing headscarves. They did the same to a twenty-six year old female commuter. Kidnappings, rapes and murders– which are sometimes reported as disappearances – frequently happen without headlines. Hair-cutting, sexual innuendos and bullying may seem comparably

minor, but their significance adds exponentially to the increasing sense of marginalization and dread so many Copts are experiencing after numerous attacks on their community.¹⁸

Because their experiences are inextricably related, in order to understand the threats faced by Christians in Muslim countries it is first necessary to understand in greater detail the way women and children in Muslim lands experience gender abuse. These details can be found woven into various feminist studies undertaken by international groups such as NGOs, various United Nation outreaches and other models. See, for instance, Freedom House's "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010."¹⁹ Also, information on women's and children's struggles appear in global surveys that document, country by country, the status of human rights.

One such study, sponsored by the World Economic Forum, is "The Global Gender Gap Report."²⁰ This report examines a wide array of issues, describing itself as an index that "benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria, and provides country rankings that allow for effective comparisons across regions and income groups, and over time." The work of a secular consortium, it provides valuable background material.

Another indispensable source of information about human rights is found in the US Department of State's annual "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." From these reports essential information can be gleaned about domestic violence, child marriage, FGM and other matters reflecting gender abuse. These reports are very helpful in tracing "normal" patterns of violence that are even more exaggerated and egregious when perpetrated against Christians.

From the US State Department's Iran Report, 2011:

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape is illegal and subject to strict penalties including execution, but it remained a problem, and the government did not enforce the law effectively. There were reports of government forces raping individuals in custody ... Sex within marriage is considered to be consensual by definition, and therefore spousal rape is not illegal. Cases of rape were difficult to document due to social stigma against the victims. Most rape victims did not report the crime to authorities because they feared punishment for having been raped, as they could be charged with adultery for being in the presence of an unrelated male while unaccompanied, indecency, or immoral behavior. They also feared societal reprisal such as ostracism. According to the penal code, rape is a capital offense, and four Muslim male witnesses or a combination of three male and two female witnesses to the rape itself are required for conviction. A woman or man found making a false accusation of rape is subject to 80 lashes.²¹

From the US State Department's Saudi Arabia report, 2011:

Widespread societal exclusion restricted women from using many public facilities. When unrelated men are present, women must sit in separate, specially designated family sections. They are not allowed to consume food in restaurants that do not have such sections. Women risk arrest for riding in a vehicle driven by a male who is not an employee or a close male relative. Cultural norms enforced by state institutions require women to wear an abaya (a loose-fitting, full-length black cloak covering the entire body) in public and to conceal their hair. ... In rural areas and smaller cities, women adhered to the traditional dress code of covering the entire body, hands, feet, hair, and face. Women also faced discrimination in courts.... In divorce proceedings women must demonstrate legally specified grounds for divorce, but men can divorce without giving cause.²²

From the US State Department's Pakistan Report, 2011:

No specific law prohibits domestic violence, which was a widespread and serious problem. Husbands reportedly beat and occasionally killed their wives. Other forms of domestic violence included torture, physical disfigurement, and shaving the eyebrows and hair off women's heads. In-laws abused and harassed the wives of their sons. Dowry and family-related disputes often resulted in death or disfigurement by burning or acid. ...

According to a 2008 HRCP report, 80 percent of wives in rural Punjab feared violence from their husbands, and nearly 50 percent of wives in developed urban areas admitted that their husbands beat them. Women who tried to report abuse faced serious challenges. Police and judges were sometimes reluctant to take action in domestic violence cases, viewing them as family problems. Instead of filing charges, police typically responded by encouraging the parties to reconcile. Abused women usually were returned to their abusive family members. Women were reluctant to pursue charges because of the stigma attached to divorce and their economic and psychological dependence on relatives. Relatives were hesitant to report abuse due to fear of dishonoring the family.²³

From the US State Department's Egypt Report, 2011:

Child Abuse: An academic survey conducted on a random sample of 1,503 households in Minya, Sohag, Cairo, and Alexandria found that 50 percent of women reported having been physically abused at a young age, with 93 percent of them suffering abuse from their parents. The survey also found that 81 percent of men believed they have the right to beat their daughters. After the revolution there were no effective government institutions dedicated to addressing these subjects.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): FGM is illegal, but it remained a problem. The law criminalizes FGM, except in cases of medical necessity,

with penalties of three months to two years in prison or a fine of approximately LE 5,000 (\$829). Enforcement generally declined during the year because some organizations working on the issue were no longer active after the revolution. On September 28, two girls in Fayoum were hospitalized after experiencing massive blood loss following FGM procedures performed on them by a traditional birth attendant (daya). According to the most recent government statistics, the government received approximately 5,000 reports of FGM cases from citizens between 2005 and 2009. In 2008 the minister of population and families stated publicly that FGM rates in Upper Egypt were 65 percent but did not exceed 9 percent in northern governorates.

Child Marriage: The legal age of marriage is 18. According to UNICEF, 17 percent of children were or had been married. As a result of post-revolution economic hardships, the incidence of child marriage increased slightly. Enforcement declined slightly due to a general decline in law enforcement capacity after the revolution. The media reported that some child marriages were temporary marriages intended to mask prostitution. Victims sometimes were encouraged by their families to marry wealthy men from the Persian Gulf region in what are known locally as transactional or “summer” marriages.²⁴

Part Three: What is the approximate scope of GBV against Christians

General sexual abuse against women provides the backdrop against which *specific* sexual abuse of Christian women and children is acted out. It is estimated that “over 200 million Christians are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith.”²⁵ It seems safe to assume that half of these Christians are female. That amounts to 100 million women and girls, and a large percentage of them live in Muslim majority countries where gender abuse is already rampant. When it is used to target Christians, the abuse is intensified, aggravated and more deadly.

Assailants share such motives as:

1. Religious hatred.
2. Desire for power and the conquest of weaker “infidels.”
3. Intention to lure Christian women away from their faith and faith communities.
4. Intention to humiliate, intimidate and dishonor victims, their families, and their Christian communities.
5. Incitement to cause physical harm emanating from jihadi sermons in mosques, declared by Islamist leaders, mullahs and imams.
6. Spiritual darkness.
7. A non-threatening and generally non-vindictive Christian culture due to impunity, vulnerability and cultural acceptance in Islamic communities.

As we've seen, since there is limited compiled information available about Gender Abuse as it relates to Christian persecution, it has to be extracted from other sources. It is logical to integrate data from reports such as those cited above with existing data about Christian persecution. For example, the four countries we have looked at most closely in this report are Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and Egypt.

Those countries are listed in the Global Gender Gap Report (2009) as *the four worst countries in the world for gender disparity*. (It is noteworthy that all ten countries rated as the worst gender gap states on the study's list are Islamic states.)²⁶

In terms of Christian persecution, those same four countries are also among the top twenty-five persecutors of Christians, according to Open Doors 2013 World Watch List – *Saudi Arabia is #2; Iran is #8; Pakistan is #14 and Egypt is #25*.²⁷

How many Christian believers are affected by these circumstances?²⁸ Using approximate population figures, we can estimate:

Saudi Arabia has around 1,250,000 Christians, a number almost entirely comprised of foreign workers. Probably half are women, among whom reports of rape and sexual abuse are unusually extensive.

Iran has an estimated 450,000 Christians, including a high number of converts from Muslim backgrounds. Women in Iran are among the most abused in the world.

Pakistan has around 5,300,000 Christians. If half of them are women and girls, and considering the levels of gender abuse that poisons the country, more than 2.5 million are at high risk.

Egypt has around 10,000,000 Christians, mostly Copts. Again, gender abuse is rampant in Egypt, most recently brought to the world's attention by widely publicized and violent sexual assaults on two female journalists.

The Christian populations in several other Muslim majority countries are in the millions, too. For example:

Indonesia, 38,854,000 – even though it is the world's most populous Muslim country.

Syria, 1,700,000 (rapidly diminishing due to the raging warfare there).

Lebanon, most estimates are close to 1,500,000.

Sudan, many but no reliable data available (many 'Southern Christians' left the country).

For Iraq, an estimated 330,000. Many Christians have reportedly fled since 2003: "Chaldean Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Andreos Abouna of Baghdad said that before the

invasion there were about 1.2 million Christians in the predominantly Shiite Muslim state.”²⁹

Are Christian women and girls more at risk than other females in Muslim majority countries? The answer is clearly yes. The only practice in which abuse might be lessened is in Christian homes, where domestic violence is not so likely to occur. But beyond that, the dangers that all women suffer in those places are made worse by anti-Christian animus and jihadi activity. Whatever the violence inflicted on women in Muslim countries, it is more severe when specifically imposed on them for religious reasons - in the name of Islam, the Prophet Mohammad, and the Koran.

It is essential for westerners to specifically consider the toll exacted on Christian victims of rape and forced marriage in Muslim countries. Virtually any woman, anywhere suffers lifelong emotional, spiritual and perhaps even physical scarring after rape. Western women describe the “shadow” that follows them in relation to mistrusting males, a vague sense of guilt, and indelible feelings of uncleanness. In Muslim lands - unfortunately even in some Christian communities - these feelings are exacerbated by cultural degradation. The loss of virginity may permanently preclude marriage. Attitudes of blame, which are nearly always projected onto the victim, can lead to shunning, verbal abuse and even, in the most extreme cases, honor killing. Relocation may offer the only hope for normalcy, yet even still the inner wound may remain unhealed.

Part Four: Explanations and Exceptions

Thankfully, all is not lost in these highly restricted countries. Largely unnoticed by secular observers, testimonies of widespread conversions from Islam to Christianity are making their way into Christian media venues. The new believers are exceptionally bold, outspoken and relentless as they bear witness to their reborn lives. That, of course, leads both to great rejoicing and to further persecution. Muslim background believers in many Sharia states face the greatest risks of all persecuted Christians, because they are accused of apostasy, which is a capital crime under Sharia law – a matter of life and death.

In another encouraging sign, at least some world leadership is paying attention to the global assault on Christians. On November 2012, German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that, across the world, Christianity is the most persecuted religion. Merkel is the daughter of a Christian pastor, and she made her comments during a meeting of the German Protestant Church. Her pronouncement was not well received. Instead she was characterized as an extremist.

CBN reported that “human rights activists say ranking faiths according to how persecuted they are is pointless, pointing out that some Muslims, Jews, and others also face persecution.” Nonetheless, Merkel was correct. It bears repeating that there are millions of persecuted Christians in today’s world. The number of victims who are targeted simply because of their Christian faith comprises the largest persecuted people group on earth. Although there are other perpetrators, an enormous number of persecuted Christians suffer at the hands of Muslims. Yet there always seem to be exceptions and excuses, often offered by certain scholars, reporters and diplomats.

Western thinkers who emphasize multi-culturalism often claim to discern moral equivalency between religious groups. “Yes, Muslims kill,” they say. “But so do Jews, Christians and Hindus.” This argument pales into invisibility thanks to death tolls in terrorist-ridden places like Nigeria and Iraq. Jewish and Christian murderers certainly exist, but in miniscule numbers when compared to the volume of Islamist killers. This is so because Islamic killing of “infidels” is ideological, systematic and, indeed, a point of pride among jihadis. Nonetheless, boilerplate accusations of “Islamophobia” provide a popular cliché to counter reports of Muslim brutality.

In another rationalization, Christian suffering in Muslim lands has been widely attributed to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territories and the wrongdoings of Zionists, including “Christian Zionists.” This explanation falls short of reality. Hatred for Israel serves well as a trigger to inflame the “Arab Street,” but at the core of the religious violence in the Middle East is something much older and much more deeply rooted. Numerous pogroms and massacres of Christians - each of them costing multiplied thousands and sometimes hundreds of thousands of Christian lives - took place across the centuries at the hand of Islam’s Ottoman Empire.

In fact, according to Islamist radicals – who empower most of the persecution – the very existence of the Jewish State of Israel in the Middle East, alongside the presence of ancient Christian communities, provokes Islamist regimes to dominate, persecute, abuse and seek to expel both Jews and Christians from lands Islamists, which they consider to be of *dar al Islam*, the house of Islam. The vision of an Islamist caliphate – a pan-Islamic Empire – spanning the Middle East and beyond does not leave room for a Jewish State of David or Christian cross.

It is, as we’ve seen, difficult if not impossible to cite a verifiable country-by-country tally of victims, and some abuses are particularly difficult to quantify. A prime example is the sodomizing of Christian boys and men. It is not unusual to hear private reports, especially in the wake of kidnapping, hostage-taking or imprisonment. Likewise, male bodies are often sexually mutilated at the scene of jihadi massacres. But although male abuse is not altogether uncommon, it is infrequently recounted.

Another example of the trivialization of Christian persecution is the claim that kidnapped Christian girls who are forced to convert to Islam and marry their captors is a myth. Naysayers assert that such cases simply reflect a tactic by which young women can escape their families and be with the men they love. The same is sometimes said of “temporary marriages.”

There is also the view that Christians suffer because they represent colonial empires in a post-colonial world. Their communities are sometime labeled as outposts of “western imperialism.” The reality is that many Christian communities in Muslim lands, especially those in the Middle East, predate Islam by several centuries. They are indigenous and first became vulnerable to Muslim persecution during the earliest Islamic conquests in the 7th and 8th Centuries.

Yes, Chancellor Merkel was correct in her remarks, no matter how much her critics insist on downplaying her view of Christian persecution. Writer Walter Russell Mead commented, “Everyone should be free to follow his or her own conscience and to follow whatever religion or secular philosophy he or she chooses. But it is true nonetheless that Christians face persecution and mob violence in countries all over the world, and it’s refreshing to hear an important world leader giving voice to this obvious but important truth.”³⁰

Part Five: Conclusion

Besides the countries we have focused on here, Christians are repressed, threatened and persecuted under the iron fist of Islam in Turkey, Indonesia, Nigeria, Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Algeria, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Maldives, Algeria, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Libya, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, the Palestinian Territories and beyond. Often too in parts of countries (the Muslim dominated areas). There are anecdotal reports from every one of these countries that include sexual abuse as a form of Christian persecution.

Unfortunately, no one knows the numbers of specific persecution victims who suffer in this specific way. When inquiries are made, journalists, diplomats and expatriates describe the subject as “taboo.” Indeed, along with fear of “doing greater harm,” mistrust and cultural secrecy stifle reports from inside restricted countries. And those who flee for safety’s sake are generally willing to speak only in whispers and generalities, unlikely to name names, cite specific examples, or somehow inadvertently endanger those they’ve left behind. Victims have their own reasons for silence – they simply do not want to recount or revisit the brutalities they have endured.

Nonetheless, what we know very well is that Christian women and children suffer widespread gender abuse in Muslim majority states. The analysis of existing evidence points to the indisputable fact that gender abuse is steadily and strategically weaponized; it is a key armament in the arsenals of all sorts of Muslim extremists – including but not limited to terrorists. This vile weaponry is available to be put to use for purposes of Islamic dominance and deadly jihadi assaults against Christian communities across the world.

Endnotes

¹ Lela Gilbert is a freelance writer and editor who has authored or co-authored more than sixty published books. Her work includes *Saturday People*, *Sunday People: Israel through the Eyes of a Christian Sojourner* (Encounter Books, 2012) and *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (co-authored, Thomas Nelson, 2013).

² <http://www.wfafi.org/laws.pdf>

³ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-09-19/iran-cleric-pummeled-by-badly-covered-woman-after-warning-her.html>

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/11/us-iran-rights-un-idUSBRE89A1O920121011>

⁵ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/myths/mf16.html>

⁶ <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3401/arab-women>

⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/02/13yearold-rape-victim-sto_n_140242.html

⁸ Personal interview with Baroness Cox, 2007.

⁹ <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/297195/re-real-war-women-nina-shea#>

¹⁰ <http://www.danielpipes.org/9637/male-female-relations>

¹¹ <http://www.investigativeproject.org/3773/the-rape-and-murder-of-pakistan-christian-children>

¹² <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pakistani-christian-girl-raped-and-murdered-38418/>

¹³ http://www.pakistanchristiancongress.org/contents.php?section_id=37

¹⁴ <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-199->

[2011#.TpVEqnnBJNs.email](http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-199-2011#.TpVEqnnBJNs.email)

¹⁵ <http://www.assistnews.net/STORIES/2011/s11120020.htm>

¹⁶ <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Punjab:-Muslims-kidnap-14-year-old-Christian-to-convert-her-to-Islam-22456.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.csi-usa.org/TellMyMotherIMissHer.pdf> As for numbers, opinions are divided.

Some organisations indicate that kidnapping of Christian girls as a form of persecution is rampant, others point to the fact that in some cases the Christian girls leave their families out of their free will after falling in love with a Muslim or for other personal reasons. A lot of shame is involved in this topic which makes it a huge challenge to do scientifically well-based research.

¹⁸ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/women-assault-cut-hair-christian-woman-metro> ;

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/03/247401.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/women039s-rights-middle-east-and-north-africa/womens-rights-middle-east-and-north-africa-2010>.

²⁰ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf

²¹ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186637.pdf>

²² <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

²³ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

²⁴ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

²⁵ http://www.worldevangelicals.org/lausanne/data/resources/IJRF_2008_Vol_1_Issue_1.pdf

²⁶ http://wikiislam.net/w/index.php?title=File:Global_Gender_Gap_index-table-a.jpg&filetimestamp=20091029212807

²⁷ [http://www.worldwatchlist.us/?utm_source=opendoorsusa.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=\(none\)](http://www.worldwatchlist.us/?utm_source=opendoorsusa.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=(none))

²⁸ Numbers of Christians are based on the World Watch List 2013 Statistics.

²⁹ <http://www.christiansofiraq.com/havefled.html>

³⁰ <http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/wrm/2012/11/07/merkel-christians-are-the-most-persecuted/>