

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Movements > World level (Movements) > Feminist Movements > Against Fundamentalisms (Feminist Movements) > **UK: Walking a tightrope: Between the pro-Islamist Left and the far-Right**

## UK: Walking a tightrope: Between the pro-Islamist Left and the far-Right

Saturday 23 November 2013, by [NAMAZIE Maryam](#) (Date first published: 22 November 2013).

Opposing Sharia and Islamism in the west is like walking on a tight rope most of the time – thwarting attacks from the Left, refuting cultural relativism, preventing alliances with the far-Right, explaining the issues ignored by government and the media, mobilising support for secularism and citizenship whilst opposing racism and xenophobia, and making linkages with the many fighting Islamism on the ground in countries across the world. It's easy to fall off the tight rope and doesn't surprise me when it happens given all the pressures involved.

Most disconcerting for many are the pressures from the Left; it is particularly hard when your “natural allies” betray basic human principles whilst using the language of rights and tolerance to defend the denial of rights and the intolerable.

Take this past weekend's panel discussion at the NYU Global Secularisms conference that I was on. One of my co-panellists said she opposed all fundamentalists, including secular ones, when asked about my talk and another accused me of aiding and abetting racism against Muslims and Arabs by my very use of the term Sharia (I'll have to comment on these later).

Add to this constant demonization, the day to day difficulties of doing such work, including the threats and all the clandestine attempts at intimidation and it is quite easy to see how one can be disillusioned and fall off the tightrope. (Just this week, I was asked to reassure a ‘moderate Muslim gentleman’ – read Islamist – with the content of my talk though he wouldn't be attending and wanted me disinvited.)

I suppose it's easier for people like me to stay the course coming from an Iranian Left political tradition with crystal clear clarity and an uncompromising defence of humanity. The Left I belong to has opposed cultural relativism and defended universal values and hasn't sided with the Iranian regime or Syria's Asad like Stop the War Coalition and the Socialist Workers Party.

When faced with such betrayal, I can fully understand that, for some, staying on course becomes impossible. What I can't understand and will never accept, though, is falling off the tightrope or even trying to stay on whilst simultaneously finding solace in and partnership with the far-Right.

The argument in favour of collaboration with the far-Right is that we need as many allies as possible in the fight against Sharia and Islamism, which means that we must be “inclusive” and “tolerant” of those whose views we may find distasteful – all for the “cause.”

Sound familiar?

Is this not what the pro-Islamist Left says in justifying its collaboration with the Islamists?

I for one already work with many groups and individuals whose views I find distasteful; it is possible to do that in specific campaigns like One Law for All. But no movement includes or represents everyone. There are limits. And there are principles that are more important than any “cause.”

Also, creating movements is not merely a numbers game. When Stop the War Coalition brought in Islamists as partners, it ignored Islamic terrorism and discrimination against women. It sided with oppressive regimes, segregated meetings and defended Sharia and the veil. It brought lots of people to the streets initially but at what cost and for how long?

Collaborating with the likes of the English Defence League (EDL) may increase numbers in the short-term, but it's self-defeating. This isn't only about numbers. Aims and principles matter too.

I've said this before and I'll say it again. I'm against the war on Iraq as is Al Qaeda but we're against it for different reasons. I'm against Sharia and so is the EDL and the supposedly reinvented Tommy Robinson but we're against it for different reasons.

I oppose Sharia in Britain and everywhere because universal rights, secularism, women's rights and equality mean something to me. The EDL and Tommy Robinson oppose it because they want to defend their "homeland" (which I am reminded is a human right recognised by the UN) from "the changes and dangers brought to it by mass influxes of people from cultures they don't understand or recognise." Can you not see the fundamental differences in position? Theirs is a xenophobic position that blames immigrants and minorities for everything wrong with Britain. It's a racist perspective that sees the teeming masses as the "other" trying to change white, British, Christian culture.

But people's "culture" is not based on their immigration or citizenship status. Not every white European represents enlightenment values – as the EDL clearly proves. Nor is every immigrant or minority a regressive theocrat. This is not about a clash of civilisations between a regressive "east" and a secularist "west" but a clash between theocrats and the religious-Right on the one hand and secularists and democrats, including Muslims and immigrants on the other.

Where we each stand is based on our politics and choices not on our "identity" or immigration status. I too am one of those teeming immigrant masses after all as are many who are at the forefront of doing much of the dirty work of defending secularism in Britain and elsewhere.

It always annoys me to no end when I hear that the EDL are the only ones speaking out against Sharia. Please, we were speaking out against Sharia when EDL/BNP-types were openly collaborating with neo-Nazis and for white supremacy. Their language may have changed but political movements and organisations are thankfully not merely judged by the duplicitous language they use.

An undue focus on Britain, "homeland" and the west means that one can only see the likes of the EDL, thereby seeking common cause where there is none.

It also means that one cannot see the real allies in this fight, including amongst the "teeming hoards of immigrants" and women and men struggling in Iran, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Algeria, Mali, Bangladesh, Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere. One Law for All and the fight against Sharia and Islamism is a continuation of their struggle and fight – not that of the EDL's and far-Right.

The far-Right will never have a place in One Law for All. I will make sure of that.

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As an aside, I must briefly address the fact that Tommy Robinson has left the EDL. I for one have nothing against working towards common goals with those who have left far-Right organisations – EDL or Islamist. One Law for All already works with ex-Islamists and ex-members of the BNP and EDL. However, I am doubtful that Tommy is a changed man. When Ed Hussain or Majid Nawaaz left Hizb ut Tahrir and founded Quilliam Foundation, they criticised the Islamist organisation they left and created a new position and space for themselves and others. Tommy has yet to do that. So far,

all I have heard from him is how proud he is of his time with the EDL; he continues to defend the organisation. He has merely criticised certain elements within the EDL but not the organisation itself and its politics. One can't be ex-EDL and still defend the EDL if one wants to show that they have truly changed. Islamists do this all the time by changing their organisational name and carrying on with business as usual.

Personally I think this is all a publicity stunt for Tommy to reinvent himself into a more palatable persona without any lasting change in his politics. (Notice how the BBC follows him everywhere?) For his politics to be considered different, he would need to take responsibility for the EDL's far-Right politics during his leadership and must be judged not only by what he says but by what he does. Only time will tell whether he is the same old Tommy; I certainly hope not.

**Maryam Namazie**

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<http://freethoughtblogs.com/maryamnamazie/2013/11/22/walking-a-tightrope-between-the-pro-islami-st-left-and-the-far-right/>

\* Maryam Namazie: This is my personal blog. Any comments made by me here are my own and don't reflect the various campaigns I work on (unless of course they are attributed to those campaigns). Some of my activities include being Spokesperson of the One Law for All Campaign against Sharia Law in Britain, the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain and Equal Rights Now - Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran. I work closely with Iran Solidarity, which I founded, and the International Committee against Stoning on the Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani stoning case amongst others. I am very much on the Left and am Central Committee member of the Worker-communist Party of Iran. Some of my other affiliations are: National Secular Society Honorary Associate and the NSS' 2005 Secularist of the Year award winner; Vice President of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association; Honorary Associate of Rationalist International; and Emeritus member of the Secular Humanist League of Brazil. I was also selected one of the top 45 women of the year 2007 by Elle magazine Quebec. Feel free to comment on any entry and I'll try to respond as soon as possible.