

The Tragic Story of the Elsehli Saudi Sisters Seeking Protection in Sydney, Australia

The bodies of two Saudi asylum seekers – found dead in their apartment in Sydney's south west in June – have been repatriated to Saudi Arabia, the country the sisters fled seeking protection in Australia. The police investigation into the deaths of Asra Abdullah Alsehli, 24, and Amaal Abdullah Alsehli, 23, continues, and officers have repeated their calls for any public information. Police have confirmed they do not know the cause of the sisters' deaths. The Guardian understands their bodies were repatriated sometime last week, and they were buried according to Islamic traditions. Asra and Amaal were found in their beds in their apartment on Canterbury Road, Canterbury on 7 June. There were no signs of forced entry at their home, nor any injuries to their bodies. It is believed the sisters had been dead for over a month when they were found. Their deaths were "suspicious in nature in that we don't know the cause of death", Detective Inspector Claudia Allcroft said.

The tragic story of the Elsehli sisters' short life in Australia has received a significant amount of media attention since their deaths were first reported in June this year.

Investigative journalists and human rights campaigners have sought to understand the suspicious circumstances leading up to and surrounding Asra and Amal's deaths.

Suggestions of potential foul play and government cover-ups have been naturally raised. This includes the possible involvement of officials from the Saudi Ministry of Interior living in Australia and possibly acting on behalf of the sisters' family. The extent to which the Saudi regime is prepared to take matters into their own criminal hands when dealing with its citizens overseas can easily have one point to the example of the brutal murder of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi. The Australian Government furthermore, wanting to avoid any potential conflict of national or security interests with the newly re-embraced, fist bumped Saudi MBS regime, would prefer the deaths to be a 'tragic suicide' than murder, requiring a transparent investigation and a potential criminal court case (if the parents would ever demand such an option).

Additionally, the broader issues as to the reasons why so many young Muslim women from Saudi Arabia choose to leave their homeland and families and travel to a far distant foreign country like Australia, as their preferred destination to claim asylum, has been discussed. This is considering that the Australian Government since 2015 has processed more than 86 asylum claims by Saudi Muslim women seeking a protection visa and 75 protection applications were granted.

The first practical reason, is that the Australian Government enables potential Saudi tourists to gain access to a tourist visa directly online. This process has enabled misguided teenage Muslim girls to avoid detection of their rebellious plans to leave Saudi Arabia. The well-known and shameful example of Rahaf Mohammed, aged 18 years at the time of her "escape to freedom" reveals such deceptive details in her book, 'Rebel'.

Then there are the naive and juvenile perceptions that these teenage young women hold towards Australia. They see Australia a good country for women who have rights, they can work, study and "they can do everything that Saudi women can't", like "running in the streets with the wind blowing"!

The hard realities however, of the Australian immigration system hits these young women upon their arrival at Sydney or Melbourne's check-in counters when Border Force Officers verifies the genuine reasons for their visit to Australia. For the young women who have managed to successfully pass off as a tourist, will later go on and lodge their asylum claims like the Elsehli sisters did.

Not ignoring the broader ideological argument that is tragic case is framed within, is the often ad nauseam suggestion that the Muslim woman would be liberated by the adoption of

secular liberal values in Muslim societies or the modelling of the governing systems in the Muslim world upon the Western secular model. However, the daily lives of many women living within Western secular liberal nations is far from enviable or liberated. The brutal and continuing cases of women being raped and murdered while walking the city streets of Melbourne or Sydney have occurred far too often. The horrifying story of 21-year-old international student Aiiia Maasarwe in Bundoora, Melbourne in 2019, who was attacked, raped and murdered at the time she was on FaceTime with her younger sister living in “Israel” is one of many examples that highlights how unsafe it can be for women walking the streets alone in liberal secular countries like Australia. In the state of Victoria, family violence is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness for women aged 15 to 44 years.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) analysis of Personal Safety Survey (PSS) data in 2016, explored sexual harassment in Australia estimating 5 million women aged 18 years and over have experienced at least one incident of sexual harassment in their lifetime. According to a 2018 Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) survey, 72% of Australians over 15 (85% women) have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetimes.

Abdullah ibn Umar reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, «أَلَا كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْنُونٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ فَإِلْمَامُ الَّذِي عَلَى النَّاسِ رَاعٍ وَهُوَ مَسْنُونٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْنُونٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ وَالْمَرْأَةُ رَاعِيَةٌ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِ زَوْجِهَا وَوَلَدِهِ وَهِيَ مَسْنُونَةٌ عَنْهُمْ وَعَبْدُ الرَّجُلِ رَاعٍ عَلَى مَالِ سَيِّدِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْنُونٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ» “Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects. A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband’s home and his children and she is responsible for them. The servant of a man is a guardian of the property of his master and he is responsible for it. No doubt, every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock.”

In this authentic Hadith, the Messenger of Allah (saw) is allocating responsibility and a duty upon every Muslim to undertake his or her responsibility towards the flock that the Shar’a has specified for him or her. So the caretaking of the people’s affairs is the responsibility of the ruler and the caretaking of the affairs of the household is the responsibility of the head of the household. When the Prophet (saw) established Islamic State in Madina, he executed his duties and responsibilities as a state leader.

The Muslim Ummah has now gone from a state ruled by Islam under which the Muslim woman was the centre of attention with respect to care and protection, and where its leaders mobilized whole armies to defend her honour...we have a world today with the loss of the Khilafah (Caliphate) where Muslim women are persecuted, starved, imprisoned, tortured, raped and butchered by the enemies of Islam with impunity, and where no army is mobilized to come to their aid. Nor does any state provide them dignified and safe sanctuary.

﴿وَأَنْ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ذَلِكُمْ وَصَاكُم بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ﴾

“And, [moreover], this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, for you will be separated from His way. This has He instructed you that you may become righteous” [Al-An’am: 153]

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<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/aug/18/bodies-of-saudi-asylum-seeker-sisters-found-dead-in-sydney-repatriated-to-country-they-fled>