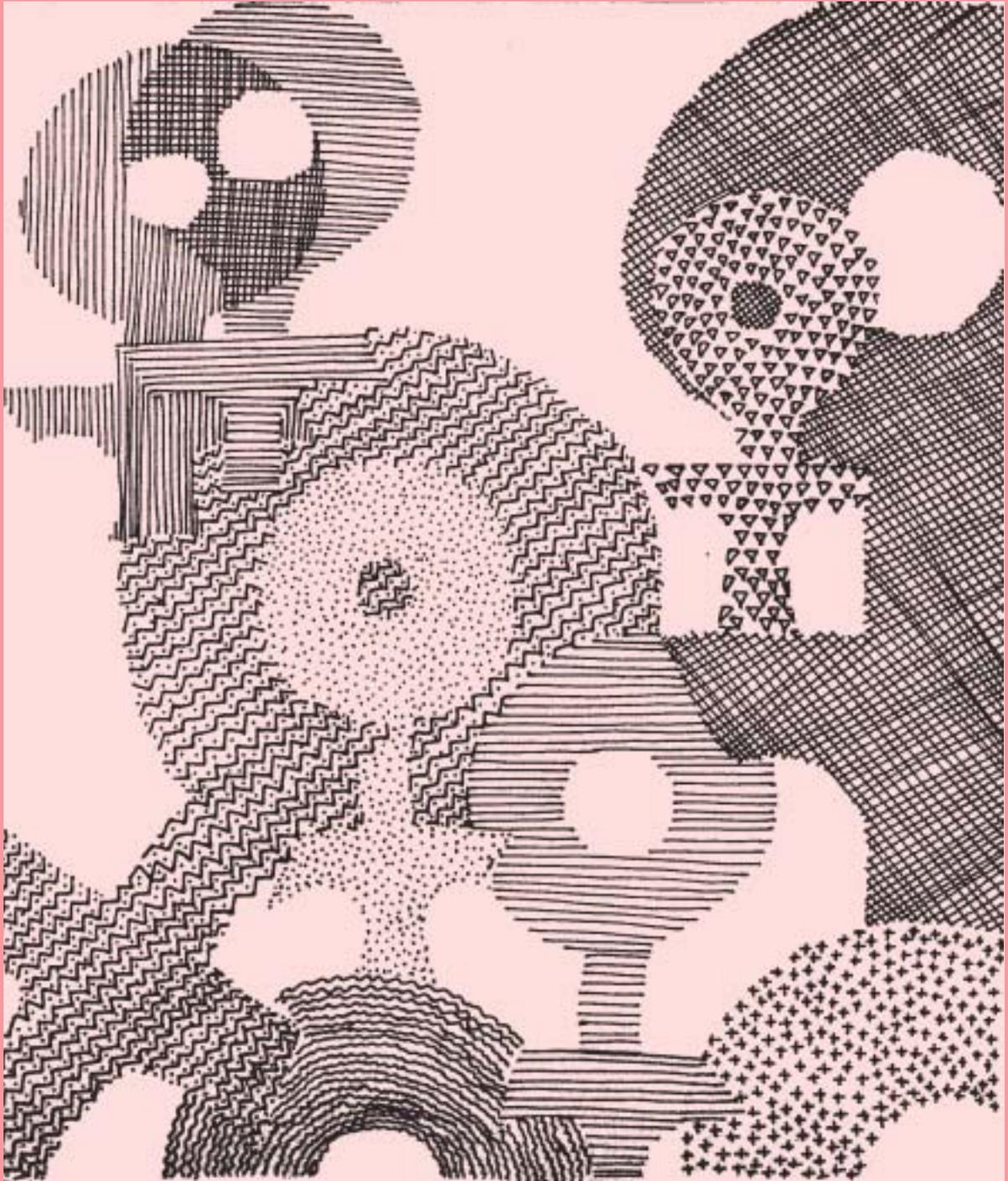


Women living under muslim laws
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين
Femmes sous lois musulmanes



Dossier 23/24

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About the Dossiers

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Contents

Introduction		3
United Kingdom		
'Race' and 'Culture' in the Gendering of Labour Markets: Young South Asian Muslim women and the British labour market	Avtar Brah	5
Identity Politics		
Culture and Identity	Amartya Sen	27
Muslim World		
Constructing Identities - Culture, Women's Agency and the Muslim World	Farida Shaheed	33
Identity Politics		
What is your tribe?: Women's struggles and the construction of Muslimness	M. A. Hélie-Lucas	49
International Feminist Movements		
The politics of theorizing 'Islamic Feminism': Implications for International Feminist Movements	Shahrazad Mojab	64
Iran		
Women in Iran Since 1979	Nikkir Keddie	81
Chronology of events Regarding Women in Iran since the Revolution of 1979.	Elfiyam Gheyntanachi	107
(Un)Veiling Feminism	Afsaneh Najmabadi	121
Algeria		
Algeria: Ordinary Fascism, Fundamentalism and Femicide	Mahl	137
Serbia		
Kosovo War, Feminists and Fascism in Serbia	Zarana Pasic	144
Kosovo/Serbia		
Words of Flora Brovina during her Trial in Nis, Serbia		153
Resource Index		
Legal Notes		158
Declarations and Statements		163
Newsbriefs		164
Organisations		216
Books and Papers		227
Periodicals		230
Audiovisuals		233

Introduction

Still to come

'Race' and 'Culture' in the Gendering of Labour Markets:

Young South Asian Muslim women and the British labour market

Avtar Brah

Feminist critiques of gender-neutral approaches to the study of labour markets have demonstrated that gender relations do not simply articulate with, but are part of, the very fabric of labour markets as they have developed. That is, gender is a constitutive element in the formation of labour markets. Studies show that gender inscribes definition of skill, construction of the division between full-time and part-time work, the differential between men's and women's wages, the nature and type of hierarchies sustained by cultures of the workplace, and the experience of paid work in the formation of identities¹. Much less attention has been paid to 'race', ethnicity, or racialised/ethnicised constructions of 'cultural difference' in the gendering of labour markets². The point is that modes of differentiation such as 'race', class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age or disability are at the heart of the constitution, operations, and differential effects of labour markets.

But how are such links to be theorised? The task is made even more complex by a general tendency in the literature to theorise the 'macro' and 'micro' aspects of analysis as separate, almost 'independent' levels. My own interest resides in trying to understand how 'macro' and 'micro' inhere. The approach suggested here problematises this binary. This approach is offered as part of an effort to theorise more adequately the relationship of Asian young Muslim women to the British labour market, but the framework will have a wider applicability. The paper explores what the women themselves

1. cf. Beechey, V. (1988) 'Rethinking the Definition of Work: Gender and Work', in J. Jensen, E. Hagen and G. Redd (eds) *Feminisation of Labour Force*, London Polity Press for an overview.

2. see 'Unemployment, Gender and Racism: Asian Youth on the dole' in A. Brah. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London Routledge; S. Westwood (1984) *All Day Everyday*, London, Pluto Press; A. Brah (1987) 'Journey to Nairobi', in S. Grewal et al. (eds) *Charting the Journey: writings by Black and Third World Women*, London: Sheba Press; S. Westwood and P. Bachu (1989) *Enterprising Women*, London: Routledge; A. Phizacklea (1990) *Unpacking the Fashion Industry*, London: Routledge; S. Walby (1990) *Theorising Patriarchy*, London: Basil Blackwell; K.K.Bhavnani (1991) *Talking Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

have to say about the place of paid work in their lives, but, following the discussion of the concept of 'experience'³, it bears repetition that narratives are constructions and not transparent guides to 'reality'. That is, they are irreducibly marked by wider economic, political and cultural processes, but they neither directly 'reflect' nor are transparently 'reflected by' them. The self that narrates is already a modality of narration of such economic, political and cultural discourses and practices. In the approach I am advocating, structure, culture and agency are conceptualised as inextricably linked, mutually inscribing formations.

The analysis is based upon both in-depth interviews with individual young Muslim women of Pakistani origin, and group interviews with them. Arguing against a general theory of gender that could then be applied to analysing specific instances of paid work, the framework proposed highlights the importance of studying the articulations - between and across relations of gender, class, ethnicity, racism, religion and so on - empirically and historically as contingent relationships. The young Muslim women narrate the contradictory codes of such articulations in their daily lives.

Discussions on the subject of young South Asian Muslim women's employment tend to be dominated by a concern with statistics which point to lower economic activity rates for this category of women compared with other groups of Asian and non-Asian women in Britain. Studies which analyse the realities behind the statistics are as yet limited. Why are young Muslim women under-represented in the labour market? What is the nature and range of factors that limit young Muslim women's fuller participation in the labour market? What are the continuities and discontinuities in the life histories of those young women not engaged in paid work as compared with those who are in employment? What are the similarities and differences in the labour market experiences of different categories of Muslim women, comparing, for example, married women with single women, or women recently arrived from Pakistan with those who have been brought up in Britain? How are educational institutions or government training schemes perceived and experienced by Muslim women? Such questions have rarely been addressed by previous research, but they form the core of a study⁴ from which the interviews discussed here derive⁵.

3. in 'Refiguring the multi: The politics of difference, commonalty and universalism' in A. Brah. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London Routledge

4. A. Brah and S. Shaw (1992) *Working Choices; South Asian Young Muslim Women and the Labour Market*, London: Department of Employment, Research Paper No.91.

5. The study upon which this [pap]er is based was funded by the Department of Employment. It focuses upon young women of predominantly Pakistani background living in Birmingham. It is a qualitative study, carried out during 1988/89, which involved 55 in-depth interviews with individuals and group discussions with 50 women in the age group

Framing Labour Markets

Discourses about Muslim women's participation in the labour market are suffused with 'culturalist' explanations. It is generally argued that Muslim women are prevented from taking up paid employment by Muslim men. The racialised themes in such discourses are now well documented (see Chapter Three). Such explanations fail to take account of a variety of aspects - discussed below - that are central to understanding the racialisation of gendered labour markets in contemporary Europe. I do not believe that analyses of women's employment necessarily demand a general theory of gender that can subsequently be deployed in analysing the specific instance of paid work. Rather, I favour a form of analysis which can address historically and culturally specific gendered processes without demarcating 'public' and 'private' as separate domains. Social labour is thus understood as gendered in historically variable forms. Such variation is embedded within histories of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and the currently evolving global order that is underpinned by 'G-Sevenism'.

I would re-emphasise the importance of studying the articulation between different forms of social differentiation, empirically and historically, as contingent relationships that are the effects of multiple determinations. Accordingly, a study of young Muslim women and the labour market would need to address how the labour of this category of women is:

- socially constructed and represented;
- experienced and figured in the landscapes of subjectivity;
- constituted by and is constitutive of labour markets; and it is
- framed within personal narratives and collective histories.

There is no suggestion here of a binary divide between culture and structure. A concept of culture that is evoked does not 'reference' an already fully constituted and fixed array of customs, values and traditions. Rather, culture is understood as a process; a nexus of intersecting significations; a terrain on which social meanings are produced, appropriated, disrupted and contested. Cultural specificities remain important but they are construed as fluid modalities, as motile boundaries constructed within a multiplicity of sites, structures and relations of power. Structure and culture are construed as relational processes. The one is not privileged over the other so that the focus shifts to how structures - economic, political, ideological - emerge and change over time in and

16-24. The women had family origin in the Mirpur district of Azad Kashmir or in the Panjab. Most of the families came to Britain from rural parts of the sub-continent, but about a sixth of them had urban backgrounds prior to migration. The young women's parents worked mainly in manual occupations in Britain (Brah and Shaw 1992).

through systems of signification, and how they in turn shape cultural meanings.

In order to understand the relationship of young Muslim women in Britain to the labour market using this approach, it would be necessary to deconstruct the concept of 'Muslim woman' as it has been constituted in British discourse. We would need to consider to what extent and in what ways these social representations construct 'Muslim woman' as a racialised category; that is, how stereotypes might serve to transmute diverse groups of Muslim women into a subject position as a racialised unit of labour. Such deconstruction would highlight discursive processes whereby labour markets are constituted as racially gendered. At the same time, analysis of women's interviews would foreground their positionality as self-narrated selves. How these self-narrations relate to 'Muslim woman' as a category of 'representation' in British discourse would, of course, be subject to empirical variation. What light do women's personal narratives throw on the way in which such 'representations' are implicated in their social identities? Do women occupy oppositional or non-oppositional subject positions within such discourses? Do their own preceptions of themselves reinforce or contest social meanings coded in such discourses?

The point I wish to stress is that it is crucial to make a distinction between 'Muslim woman' as a discursive category of 'representation' and Muslim women as embodied, situated, historical subjects with varying and diverse personal or collective biographies and social orientations.

There are at least seven dimensions which would seem critical to understanding the form, extent and patterns of Muslim women's participation on British labour markets. These are:

- 1 the histories of colonialism and imperialism which shaped the patterns of post-World War II migrations into Western Europe;
- 2 the timing of migration;
- 3 the post-war restructuring of the national and global economies;
- 4 changing structure of the regional and local labour markets;
- 5 state policies, especially on immigration control;
- 6 racism in the labour market;
- 7 segmentation of the labour market by gender, class, age and ethnic background.

I elaborate this framework below by drawing out its implications and by thinking it through the study referred to above⁶. In the first section I

6. A.Brah and S.Shaw (1992) *Working Choices; South Asian Young Muslim Women and the Labour Market*, London: Department of Employment, Research Paper No.91.

consider how the seven dimensions listed above inscribe the terrain on which young Muslim women's relationship to the labour market is shaped and negotiated. The second section addresses the social imagery through which Muslim Women are socially constructed in Britain, and the impact this field of representation has on how young Muslim women are positioned in social relations. This is followed by an analysis of women's narratives.

How would the proposed framework inform a study of young Muslim women and the labour market, such as the one we made?

First, the emphasis on historical perspective draws attention to the colonial background that frames the formation of South Asian communities in Britain. The colonial encounter, as is now well known, was a complex and contested arena of economic, political and cultural relations marked by gendered forms of racism. As Mies⁷ points out, colonial regimes of accumulation were centrally implicated in class-mediated changes in the organisation and structure of families and households in metropolitan societies as much as they were in the colonies. The emergence of the notion of a 'family wage' in Western societies, Mies argues, owes not a little to the extraction of surplus from the colonies. Certain weaknesses in parts of her argument notwithstanding⁸, Mies demonstrates the centrality of gender and racialisation processes as constitutive elements in the development of a global economy. She shows how patriarchal systems of colonisers and colonised have been interconnected since long before the post-World War II migrations from the sub-continent.

A historical perspective also draws attention to the conditions under which immigrant labour was deployed in post-war Britain. The economic boom from 1945 until the late 1960s that helped to draw a growing number of white British women in the labour force also led to the recruitment of workers from Britain's former colonies. Both sets of workers were employed predominantly in low-wage sectors of the economy. Segregation of the labour market by gender meant, however, that male and female workers were concentrated in different sectors of the economy. Asian women experienced the labour market not simply through their gender but also as racialised subjects. Even within a gender-segregated labour market they occupy a distinctive profile compared with white women. As we have already seen, overall, a higher proportion of women than men in Britain are engaged in part-time work. This pattern of employment is often taken as a major contributory factor towards women's low pay. However, a higher proportion of Asian women than white women are in full-time employment. Yet their earnings are lower compared with those of white

7. M. Mies (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, London: Zed Press.

8. cf. S. Walby (1990) *Theorising Patriarchy*, London

women. Whereas the overall pattern for women in Britain is that they are concentrated in the service industries, Asian women are more commonly found in low-paid, semi-skilled and unskilled work in the manufacturing sector, particularly in the clothing and textile industries which have recently been in decline. Even in those industries where women predominate, Asian women are concentrated in the lowest level jobs, and unemployment rates among Asian women are much higher compared with white women⁹.

In the early phase of post-war migration, Pakistani men had arrived predominantly without their female kin. The class position of these men as low-wage workers resident in declining inner areas of British cities was to have a crucial effect on the type of employment available to Pakistani women as they began to arrive. The argument that fewer Pakistani women entered the labour market primarily due to 'cultural reasons' warrants interrogation rather than dismissal without consideration. I set this issue aside for the moment, and discuss the effects of timing of migration, economic change, immigration control and racism in shaping the structure of job opportunities for Pakistani women.

Timing of immigration and post-war socio-economic change

Pakistani women migrated to Britain later than women from India (who were mostly Sikhs and Hindus). The former arrived mainly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, whereas Asian women who entered the labour market in the early phase of the post-war migrations were mainly Sikh and Hindu women. These Asian women took up paid employment at a time of economic growth and relative stability. Mass production concentrated in factories, and centralised forms of work organisation and managed national markets were a key feature of this phase. Most Asian women, including the small number of Muslim women in employment at this time, found paid work doing semi-skilled and unskilled jobs generated by this form of production.

From the 1970s, economies of the advanced industrial societies began to undergo fundamental restructuring. The global economy became increasingly transnationalised, creating new forms of the international division of labour alongside the older ones. In Britain, the decline in the old manufacturing sector, where Asian workers had been concentrated, led to large-scale job loss. These economic changes entailed a rise of 'flexible specialisation', leading to more decentralised forms of labour process and a greater emphasis on the contracting out of functions and services. New types of small business proliferated within national economies. There was a growth of jobs in the service sector, but the increase was concentrated

9. see *Gendered Spaces: Women of South Asian Descent in 1980's Britain*, in A. Brah. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London Routledge

primarily in low-status, part-time work and a variety of forms of 'homeworking'¹⁰.

It will be evident from the above that Muslim women arriving in Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s would have encountered the labour market in a period of major economic restructuring and recession. While this resulted in the contraction of certain types of jobs, there was an expansion of small businesses, especially those which rely upon the 'putting out' system. The ready availability of paid work that could be carried out from home would have held a strong appeal for Muslim women with young families to care for. Over a period of time, as 'homeworking' became an established pattern, more and more women were likely to be drawn into it through kinship and friendship networks. In other words, the growing involvement of Muslim women in 'homeworking' during this period could not be explained simply in terms of 'cultural constraints'.

The relationship of Pakistani women to the labour market cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of the significance of region and locality. The South Asian groups are concentrated in specific regions. The highest concentrations of Pakistanis are found in London and the South East, with substantially large settlements also in Yorkshire, Humberside and in the North West. Our study¹¹ was made in the city of Birmingham in the West Midlands. During the 1980s, major job losses occurred in the West Midlands, especially in manufacturing where there has been a concentration of Asian workers. In the city of Birmingham, this pattern was even more pronounced. Between 1981 and 1984, Birmingham City declined twice as fast as the region as a whole (Birmingham City Council 1988). The devastating impact of this change on Asian households may be gauged given that, according to the 1971 census, just over 60 per cent of male workers of Pakistani and Indian origin in the West Midlands worked in the manufacturing industries. Asian women, too, have been concentrated in manufacturing, principally in textiles and clothing. While there has been a relative increase in employment in the service sector, this is primarily in those enclaves where the Asian workforce is as yet under-represented. Moreover, according to Birmingham City Council's 1986 Review of Economic Strategy, such expansion mainly consists of growth in low-paid employment, and self-employment at lower levels of the income scale.

10. S.Mitter (1986) *Common Fate, Common Bond: Women in the Global Economy*, London: Pluto Press; Allen and Massey (1988) *The Economy in Question*, London: Sage; J. Jensen et al. (1988) *Feminisation of Labour Force*, London: Polity Press; S. Hall and M.Jacques (1983) *The Politics of Thatcherism*, London: Lawrence & Wishart; Phizacklea (1990) *Unpacking the Fashion Industry*, London: Routledge.; Nazir (1991) *Local Development in the Global Economy: The Case of Pakistan*, Aldershot: Avebury Press.

11. A.Brah and S.Shaw (1992) *Working Choices; South Asian Young Muslim Women and the Labour Market*, London: Department of Employment, Research Paper No.91.

Such regional and local trends have been crucial to the type, range and extent of employment available to young women.

Immigration control

The impact of immigration legislation on Asian families is now well documented. Social constructions of Asian marriage and family relations as a 'problem for British society' have been pivotal in the legitimisation of British immigration policy. Images of 'tidal waves' of Asian men scheming to circumvent immigration restrictions through the arranged marriage system were commonly invoked in the justification of immigration control. While the Asian male was defined as a prospective worker posing a threat to the employment prospects of white men, Asian women were defined in immigration law as 'dependants'. This social imagery of Asian women as hapless dependants who would most likely be married off at the earliest possible opportunity has played an important role in constructing the 'commonsense understandings' which teachers, employment advisers, training officers and other professionals might hold of young Muslim women's education and employment prospects. Such professionals have an important role to play in encouraging or discouraging young Muslim women from pursuing certain types of education or employment¹².

There is now an extensive literature that documents direct and indirect discrimination in the labour market in terms of access to employment, promotion and training¹³. Such discriminatory practices are constituted in and through a variety of racialised discourses and practices that construct the racialised group as inherently 'different'. Just as patriarchal discourses may represent women's labour as 'different' and/or inferior, racialised discourses call into question the abilities, aptitudes, cultural attributes, and the general suitability of a group for certain types of jobs and positions within the employment hierarchy. Research shows that teachers, careers officers and employers can all be implicated in practices that have life-long adverse consequences for individuals¹⁴.

12. Cross et al. (1990); A.Brah and S.Shaw (1992) *Working Choices; South Asian Young Muslim Women and the Labour Market*, London: Department of Employment, Research Paper No.91.

13. cf. W.W.Daniel (1968) *Racial Discrimination in England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin; D.Brooks and K.Singh (1978) *Aspirations versus Opportunities: Asian and White School Leavers in Midlands*, London: Commission for Racial Equality; C.Brown (1984) *Black and White Britain*, London: Heinemann; D.Drew et al. (1991) *Against the Odds: The Educational and Labour Market Experiences of Black Young People*, Sheffield: Department of Employment Training, Research and Development Series.

14. G.Lee and J.Wrench (1983) *Skill Seekers*, Leicester: National Youth Bureau; M.Cross et al. (1990) *Ethnic Minorities and the Careers Service: Investigation into Processes of Assessment and Placement*, London: Department of Employment, Research Paper No. 73; D.Drew et al. (1991) *Against the Odds: The Educational and Labour Market Experiences of Black Young People*, Sheffield: Department of Employment Training, Research and Development Series.;

Images, representations, and lived culture

Where Asian women are concerned, racialised constructions articulate with those of gender, ethnicity, religion and class in the social representations of this category of women in Britain. There is a long history of orientalist discourses embedded in literature, paintings, drawings, photography, 'scientific' discourse, political debate, state policies and practices and in 'commonsense'. The 'oriental female', especially the Muslim woman, came to occupy a position of the quintessential 'Other' in this discursive space of desire¹⁵. Whether she is exoticised, represented as ruthlessly oppressed and in need of liberation, or read as a victim/enigmatic emblem of religious fundamentalism, she is likely to be cast as the bearer of 'races' whose 'alien' cultures continually threaten to disrupt 'civilised values'. She excites Western fantasies of transgression: mystique, lust, danger. The 'veil' is the ultimate icon of this fantasmatic field, frustrating the Western gaze by its opaqueness and its apparent dismissal and disregard for its hegemonic moves. 'Veil' is the metaphor for the orientalisation of the contradictions of gender and imperialism. But orientalisation is a process, and there is no one-to-one direct correspondence either between colonial representations of groups who were 'orientalised' (Arabs, Turks, Indians, for example, have been orientalised in different ways), or between colonial representations and contemporary discourses. There are continuities as well as discontinuities across this discursive field. Hence, social images of Pakistani women in present day Britain may in part derive from colonial representations of Muslims in colonial India, but, essentially, they are an integral component of the field of representation associated with the Pakistani presence in post-war Britain. Such social imagery connects also with discourses of 'the Muslim' in Western Europe as a whole. There would seem to be substantial overlap in the available imagery of young Muslim women in different parts of Western Europe¹⁶.

But how do such images of Muslim or other categories of Asian women affect their employment trajectories? They do so when, as noted above, these stereotypes are translated into institutional practices with adverse

see also *Gendered Spaces: Women of South Asian Descent in 1980's Britain*, in A. Brah. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London Routledge

15. cf. Said (1978) *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books; Alloula (1986) 'The Colonial Harem', *Theory and History of Literature*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

16. see *Gendered Spaces: Women of South Asian Descent in 1980's Britain*, in A. Brah. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London: Routledge; Parmar (1982) 'Gender Race and Class: Asian Women in Resistance', Centre for Contemporary Conflict Studies, University of Birmingham, *The Empire Strikes Back*, London: Hutchinson.; A. Brah and R. Minhas (1985) 'Structural Racism or Cultural Difference?: Schooling for Asian Girls', in G. Weiner (ed.) *Just a Bunch of Girls*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press; H. Lutz (1991) *Migrant Women of 'Islamic Background': Images and Self Images*, Amsterdam: Middle East Research Associates, Occasional paper (11).

consequences for women's position in the labour market. For example, the discourse of 'cultural constraints on Muslim women' is played out within a myriad of practices on the part of teachers, education and training guidance providers, recruitment and personnel officers, youth workers, social workers, and so on. The general currency of such ideas on a wide scale through the media means that they have become sedimented into a collective common-sense. Their influence can be all-pervasive, although the precise meaning and significance attached to them would depend upon how they articulate under given circumstances.

To highlight the discourse of 'cultural constraints' as ideology is not to deny the importance of culture. But what do we mean when we speak of cultural constraints? In discussions of Muslim women the 'cultural' constraint that is most frequently invoked is the institution of 'purdah' - a series of norms and practices which limit women's participation in public life. It is important to point out that this social concept signifies practices which vary enormously from one historical period to another, from one country to another, and from one social group to another. Even within the same social group its patterns of observance can differ considerably along class, caste and other dimensions¹⁷. Nor is this institution confined to Muslims in the Asian sub-continent. Versions of 'purdah' are also observable among Hindus and Sikhs. Indeed, Sharma (1980) argues that, in terms of its broader meaning as a sign for the complex of discourses and practices which circumscribe women's participation in public life, the concept may have some applicability in all societies. In this sense, the segregation of the labour market by gender in Britain, for instance, could be understood as a set of patriarchal ideologies and practices that are not entirely different from 'purdah'. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the specificity of Islamic forms of 'purdah', but without viewing the institution as uniform, fixed or unchanging. The important issue, then, is how 'purdah' is played out differently among different Muslim groups and other South Asian communities in Britain, and how it articulates with other British patriarchal ideologies and practices. The point I wish to stress is that 'Asian' patriarchal discourses and practices in Britain are not exogenous to British society; they are very much an internal dynamic of the British social formation.

The lived cultures that young Muslim women inhabit are highly differentiated, varying according to such factors as country of origin, rural/urban background of households prior to migration, regional and linguistic background in the sub-continent, class position in the sub-continent as well as in Britain, and regional location in Britain. Asian-British

17. N. El Sadawi (1980) *The Hidden Face of Eve*, London: Zed Press; U.Sharma (1980) *Women, Work and Property in North India*, London: Tavistock Publications.

cultures are not simply a carry-over from the sub-continent but are now 'native' to different regions and localities of Britain. Asian cultures of London, for example, may be distinguished from those of Birmingham. Similarly, East London Asian cultural life has its own distinctive features compared with the local cultures of West London. There are some commonalities, of course, depending upon which particular modality - religion, region, language, class, etc. - is singled out. For example, Panjabi cultures have their own specificities compared with Gujerati or Bengali cultures. On the other hand, all Muslim groups, be they Panjabi, Gujerati or Bengali, share certain cultural specificities. But each case is simultaneously a dimension of region and locality - of 'Englishness', 'Scottishness', 'Welshness', 'Irishness', or of 'Geordiness', 'Cockneyness', 'Yorkshireness', and so on. In the everyday lives of women, these are not separate but enmeshing realities. They can not be disaggregated into 'Asian' and 'British' components. They are fusions such that 'Asian-British' is a new ensemble created and played out in the everyday life world.

Therefore, as I said earlier, it is crucial to distinguish between 'young Pakistani women' as a generalised object of social discourse and young Pakistani women as embodied historical subjects. The latter are a diverse and heterogeneous category of people who occupy a multiplicity of subject positions. As is the case with other subjects, their everyday lives are constituted in and through matrices of power embedded in intersecting discourses and material practices. The next section examines how the respondents to the study are constituted by and in turn elaborate the discourse of women's paid and unpaid labour. We examine the ways in which women's narratives represent a range of responses and strategies- of accommodation, complicity, resistance, struggle, transgression - as they negotiate the many and varying facets of power in their everyday lives. The aim is to explore how wider social structures are implicated in the lived cultures that the women inhabit.

Narrating Self and the Rest

It is axiomatic that paid employment is only one form of work. Although wage labour has existed for many centuries, the almost total dependence of households on a wage is a relatively recent phenomenon. In Europe, where it is now the dominant pattern, it only dates from the nineteenth century (Pahl 1988). It is a commonplace to say that women have always worked. In most societies, however, some of the most demanding work that women perform, i.e. housework, child care and caring work for other members of the family, is rarely regarded as 'work', such as the notion of 'work' is now a synonym for paid work. While many women are engaged in paid forms of work, whether inside the household in some form of homeworking or on an

employer's premises, the ideology of the male breadwinner is still pervasive in advanced industrialised societies¹⁸.

In less industrialised countries, the subsistence sector is comparatively large and the demarcation between 'productive' work and work for creation of 'use values' is less clear. Women may be involved in a variety of tasks which simultaneously form part of the market economy and in the production of goods and services directly for consumption within the household¹⁹. In South Asia, women perform a wide range of economic activities both inside and outside the household. In urban Pakistan, women may work in a variety of professions such as teaching, medicine and social work. Women may also be found in some of the lowest status forms of paid work, including road and building construction, municipal street sweeping and domestic service. In rural areas, women are likely to be responsible for the care of domestic animals and the processing of food for preservation and storage; they may undertake specialised forms of agricultural work such as the transplanting of rice, and take part in general sowing and harvesting of crops; and they may weave, sew and produce handicrafts alongside other domestic and child care responsibilities²⁰. In other words, Pakistani women who migrated to Britain are likely to have been involved in a variety of economic activities prior to migration. What would be new when they migrated would not be the prospect of 'working' but rather the experience of paid work in an advanced industrialised society.

There is a dearth of research case lore from which to develop a systematic picture of the labour market realities of young Muslim women. Much of the research carried out relates to the immigrant generation²¹. One exception is a pilot study involving a dozen households where the author

18. cf. D. Leonard and M.A. Speakman (1986) 'Women in the Family: Companions or Caretakers?', in V. Beechy and E. Whitelegg (eds) *Women in Britain Today*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press; S. McRae (1989) *Flexible Working Time and Family Life*, London: Policy Studies Institute; C. Hall (1992) *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, London, Verso.

19. L. Beneria and G. Sen (1981) 'Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role in Economic Development: Boserup Revisited', *Signs*, 7(2).; K. Young and C. Wolkowitz (eds.) (1981) *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective*, London: CSE Books; Redclift (1985) 'The Contested Domain: Gender Accumulation and the Labour Process', in N. Redclift and E. Mingion (eds.) *Beyond Unemployment*, Oxford Basil Blackwell.

20. Papanek (1971) 'Purdah in Pakistan', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, August; Nazir (1991) *Local Development in the Global Economy: The Case of Pakistan*, Aldershot: Avebury Press.

21. Dhaya (1974) 'The Nature of Pakistani Ethnicity in Industrial Cities in Britain', in A. Cohen (ed.) *Urban Ethnicity*, A.S.A. Monograph (12) London: Tavistock Publications.; U. Saifullah-Khan (1974) *Pakistani Villagers in a British City*, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Bradford; P. Jeffery (1976) *Migrants and Refugees*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; M. Anwar (1979) *The Myth of Return*, London: Heinemann.

interviewed daughters, mothers and grandmothers in the city of Bradford²². In this account, we encounter women employed largely as homeworkers, although some women had worked in mills before the birth of their children, or as unpaid workers in a family business - and, in some cases, as 'career women'. Clearly these women were economically active, although few would be included in formal statistics.

In our study we interviewed five categories of women: those who were not looking for paid employment; those engaged in paid work (both those working on employers' premises and homeworkers); unemployed women; trainees on Government Training Schemes; and students in courses of further or higher education. This range of women were interviewed because, in order to fully understand why some Muslim women do not enter the labour market, we needed to know why others already have done so. Also, it is important to know what perceptions and aspirations are represented among women enrolled on courses of education and training.

To work or not to work?

This question held different significance depending upon whether the respondent was a student or a trainee, an unemployed young woman, a woman with young children weighing the advantage of an income against the cost of paying a childminder or nursery fee, or someone already engaged in paid work outside the home or as a 'homeworker'. The most striking common aspect of the responses we received was that the women overwhelmingly supported women's right to paid work. Irrespective of whether or not they themselves wished, or were in a position, to find employment, this support was consistently echoed in the interviews. It represents a serious critique of patriarchal discourses which privilege male income and construct women's labour as singularly appropriate to caring responsibilities in the household. It interrogates the hegemonic claims of such ideologies. Women's earnings were considered by our respondents as an indispensable contribution to the income of households. Paid work was also valued for offering women a measure of independence and a sense of confidence.

When performed outside the household, paid work was thought to provide a much needed network of contacts beyond those of family and kinship. Employment outside the home was considered an antidote to the boredom and isolation of staying at home. Workplace friendships were experienced as a source of fun. Women talked about the joy of sharing a joke, teasing, engaging in casual banter, sharing out items of lunch brought from home, gossiping, offering a sympathetic ear to workmates experiencing domestic or other problems, sharing 'a moan' against

22. H. Afshar (1989) ' Gender Roles and the " Moral Economy of Kin" among Pakistani Women in West Yorkshire', *New Community*, 15(2): 211-24.

employers, and so on. Contradictions of gender, ethnicity, racism, class and generation seemed to be played out in all their complexity in these workplace cultures. The importance attached by women to workplace cultures is also attested by ethnographic studies of women in the workplace²³.

Barriers to employment

If the great majority of women emphasised the importance of paid work for women, why were some of them not looking for employment? All the women who fell into this category - both married and single - cited housework and other caring responsibilities as taking up most of their time. The single women often had to share responsibility for looking after their younger brothers and sisters, or, in some cases, their nephews and nieces. In instances where a mother suffered ill health, the single woman had to assume the overall responsibility for the household. There was no doubt that, for these women, housework and other forms of caring work including child care, care of elderly parents-in-law, or that of other members of the extended family, constituted 'work' par excellence:

How can I look for other work, I can't even finish my housework. I have plenty of work to do: wash, iron, make dinner and all that. My mum can't do it because of poor health, so I have to do the housework.

18-year-old single woman

Housework takes up all my time. There are eight of us at home. Cooking, cleaning the house, washing clothes, ironing - it never finishes.

20-year-old single woman

I have four children, three boys and a girl. I have my hands full... Besides, if I did work I would have to place the children in a nursery. That costs more than the wage I would earn.

Young married woman

Of course, there is a sense in which these narratives might be understood as being typical of any woman under such circumstances. But while these women are not alone in finding domestic responsibilities onerous, there are two factors that have a particular bearing on this group. First, these women often had responsibility for larger-than-average households, which sometimes included members of the extended family. Second, domestic appliances such as washing machines or dishwashers that might relieve the pressures of housework were not a common feature of many households, especially those facing difficult material circumstances in a period of high

23. cf. A.Pollert (1981) *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*, Basingstoke: Macmillan; S.Westwood (1984) *All Day Everyday*, London: Pluto Press.

unemployment. A similar finding is reported by Shaw²⁴ (1988). It is worth bearing in mind that both during and since the last decade, Pakistani households in Birmingham have been one of the hardest hit by job losses in the area. In our study, we came across families where several members of the household were unemployed. Moreover, even when a household might not be directly affected by unemployment, low income might still be a problem due to the concentration of Pakistanis in low-paid jobs. Moreover, the financial demands of mutual obligations amongst extended kin may further deplete disposable household income.

It is sometimes suggested that South Asians from rural Pakistan, as compared to those from urban centres, might be more inclined to restrict women's entry in the labour market. However, we did not find any major differences in family background prior to migration between women who were not searching for a job and those who were 'economically active' - that is, who were either unemployed or employed. The families of the majority of women in all three categories migrated from rural parts of Pakistan. Rural origin in itself, therefore, could not account for whether or not young Pakistani women would take up employment. Nor did marital status emerge as a particularly important determinant of women's propensity to seek paid work. Although single women were more likely to be economically active, they were also strongly represented among those not looking for paid work.

One factor that did seem to have a clear influence on the likelihood of a woman participating in the labour market was her length of stay in Britain. We found that the great majority of women who were active in the labour market were born here or arrived here as children. In contrast, most of the women who were not pursuing employment came to Britain as teenagers or later and, as a consequence, their experience of schooling in Britain was limited. In Pakistan they had attended mainly village schools. In Britain the majority had left school without achieving any formal qualifications, and some experienced difficulty in using English. Such women often perceived their lack of formal qualifications and their limited facility in the English language as a barrier to 'good jobs'.

Sitting at home you get bored. But finding jobs is not easy. I have to learn English first.

At the moment I don't know. When I have learnt English and other things I'll see whether I want to work or not. English is a big problem for me.

These women were not unaware of jobs in the secondary sector of the labour market, especially in the clothing industry in Birmingham where

24. A. Shaw (1988) *A Pakistani Community in Britain*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

employers asked no questions about knowledge of English or other types of formal qualification. But the young women categorised these as 'bad jobs' with low rates of pay and poor working conditions. Such jobs held no attraction for the women, since they would merely impose an extra burden on existing demands on their time from domestic responsibilities, without any of the advantages of a well-paid job with good working conditions.

I said earlier that women's position in the labour market is defined, not simply by the structure of the labour market or the needs of the economy, but also by patriarchal ideologies which define women's position in society. Social norms about 'women's work' and 'men's work' are constitutive of the unequal division of labour in the household, occupational segregation of the labour market by gender, and the possibility that a substantial number of women may never enter the labour market. Patriarchal ideologies have a bearing on all women in Britain, but they may take specific forms in relation to young Muslim women. Notions of 'purdah', as has already been pointed out, vary enormously among Muslim groups. But where families do wish to observe such norms the prospect of women going out to perform paid work causes deep concern because it is thought to signal the inability of men to provide for the economic maintenance of the household. The generalised ideology of the male as breadwinner, common in Britain and other Western countries, emerges in this system of signification as 'family honour'. The prospect of young women working away from home unchaperoned is understood as providing fertile ground for malicious gossip. Such gossip is considered a serious threat to a woman's reputation. Sue Lee's²⁵ work demonstrates the power of gossip and innuendo in casting doubts on a young woman's reputation in British schools. A white girl who has been constructed as a 'slag' may redeem her reputation by finding a steady boyfriend. Such possibility of patriarchal 'redemption' through the heterosexual economy of desire is not available to young Asian women. They must have a reputation of no sexual involvement prior to marriage if they are to help maintain their 'family honour', something that was not generally uncommon in Britain that long ago. The point is that both instances are exemplars of patriarchal practices.

What is interesting in terms of our study is that only about a quarter of our respondents gave their families' opposition to women holding jobs away from the home on the grounds of 'izzat' and 'purdah' as the major reason why they were not doing paid work. But when opposition did occur constraints could be quite stringent:

My parents want me to stay at home... The relatives are the same as well. They say she shouldn't go out... I don't even sign on. I think they wouldn't mind me doing homeworking... If I was at home they could keep

25. As we saw in *Gendered Spaces: Women of South Asian Descent in 1980's Britain*, in A. Brah. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London Routledge

an eye on me. If I went to a factory they might think I will go somewhere else with a friend, or I might find a boyfriend.

My parents didn't let me out of the house. Straight home from school, do the housework and stay in. Didn't see my friends. My Mum is stricter than my Dad. Dad used to say 'let them go out', but she wouldn't. She said people would talk.

Patriarchal norms and practices cannot, however, be regarded simply as 'external constraints'. As we saw in the last chapter and in the first part of this one, at any given moment our subjectivity is marked by the discursive field of complex articulation between the psychic and the social. We have different investments in different political positions. That is, women may be positioned or even consciously position themselves differently within patriarchal discourses, not because they are either 'oppressed' or 'forced' to do so or because they are propelled by an enlightened self-referencing agency, but because they are emotionally, psychically, subjectively invested in specific positionalities where the effects of the social dynamics of power are non-reductively interiorised into the contradictory modalities of the mind. So, how did the young women who were not looking for employment construct themselves in terms of the cultural practices that serve to exclude women from the labour market? In some cases the young women echoed the gender-specific injunctions that mark the concept of 'izzat'. As one woman observed:

When women work outside the home it brings 'Be Izzti' (dishonour) on the family. I do not think women should work outside the home. I do not want a daughter of mine to work! [translated]

But other women opposed the idea that women should not hold jobs outside the home. Their responses to the personal circumstances that had led to their own exclusion from the labour market differed considerably. One single woman, currently unable to take up paid work due to the opposition of her parents, lived in the hope that her future partner would be more liberal on the subject. A second young woman, whose parents had not considered it appropriate for unmarried women to work outside the home, and who was married soon after leaving school, found that her husband too was not in favour of her finding a job. Feeling isolated and bored at home, she feels quite disenchanted with this aspect of her life. But she is determined to ensure that when she has children her daughter will get similar opportunities to a son. Her own life might have been constrained by the normative construction of the male as breadwinner, but she is keen to negotiate a different future for her daughter. A third woman, who was twenty-four-year-old young mother with three children, would not take up employment because of child care responsibilities, but she was planning to train as a nursery nurse when her children were older. Her husband and in-laws were supportive of her job aspirations. It is clear that

young Pakistani women who are outside the labour market constitute a diverse and differentiated category of individuals.

Dilemmas of paid work

Muslim women may be under-represented in those forms of paid work which are accessible to statistical collation. But they are far from absent in the labour market. As we saw earlier, evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of these women may be engaged in 'home-working'. On the other hand, Muslim women are also employed in a range of manual, office and clerical, as well as professional, jobs in Britain. This range was reflected among our employed respondents, with three of them working in a clothing factory, one self-employed as a graphic designer, one a primary school teacher. Another respondent worked for the local authority in a middle-range advisory/managerial post, three worked in the voluntary sector as community workers or advice workers, and two worked from home as 'homeworkers'. Another twelve women were unemployed. A common characteristic of both employed and unemployed women was their determination to find a job. They placed great emphasis on the need for women to be economically active:

I think men and women should have equal rights. If men work why can't women? Women are not just there to do the housework.

I strongly disagree with those who think that women should not work outside the home. Well, why should they stay at home? Why can't men stay at home?

I think that both men and women should work. You can't live on one person's income... It is important to me not to be dependent on anyone - my Mum or husband. I am ambitious for myself.

A substantial proportion of our respondents belonged to families who were quite flexible about women holding jobs. In such instances, parents had been at the very least non-obstructive and, in several cases, positively encouraging about the education and career ambitions of their daughters:

When I decided to look for jobs my parents were not overjoyed. But they didn't stop me either.

My parents left the choice to me: you can stay at home or go to work just as long as you don't give me a bad name and people can't point the finger.

My parents were very encouraging. They said, 'do what you want to do'.

Where families were initially reluctant, the women used a variety of strategies of persuasion to obtain consent, often recruiting the support of sympathetic relatives or family friends to help negotiated a desired outcome. Academic and professional jobs are especially highly regarded among Asian groups. Even those parents who might at first be ambivalent

about a daughter pursuing higher education/professional qualifications for fear that the young woman may become 'wayward', as one respondent put it, will feel quite proud once she has achieved such qualifications.

Not surprisingly, economic necessity emerged as one of the most effective persuaders:

At first I didn't work because my parents didn't want me to. Dad is unemployed now. It is hard. I am looking for work now.

Well it is hard because my Mum doesn't really want me to have a job. But we have been forced to because we've got no money... My parents want me to sew at home [homeworking]. Loads of girls my age [17] do it around here. But I don't want to.

When my father retired of ill health we actually had to support ourselves... There's no way my sisters could have got married - right - the dowry, the jewelry and hiring the hall, feeding the guests - all that - without previous employment.

The effects of immigration legislation were also cited as influencing women's decision to participate in the labour market. Our respondents argues that the law discriminates against Asians, and the young women are particularly caught up in this through the 'primary purpose' clause which places the onus on an applicant from the Asian sub-continent married to a British-born Asian woman to provide the burden of proof that the marriage was not contracted primarily for the purpose of immigration to Britain. The immigration rules also stipulate that persons wishing to bring their spouses over to live in Britain must be able to support them without recourse to public funds. Families are often divided across continents due to these laws, and the women who wish to sponsor a spouse must find employment in order to provide proof of being able to support a spouse without recourse to public funds²⁶.

Whatever the reasons given for holding a job, and irrespective of the level of social importance attached to women's right to employment by individual women, paid work was not always experienced as an unequivocal advantage. Managing the 'double-shift' of domestic responsibilities alongside paid work was likely to be exhausting²⁷. For most women combining these two types of work the day could start as early as five or six o'clock in the morning, and may not end until ten or eleven o'clock at night after the household chores, or the task related to paid work (e.g. marking student essays or preparing for the next day's lessons, in the

26. cf. R.Sondhi (1987) *Divided Families*, London: Runnymede Trust

27. see 'Unemployment, Gender and Racism: Asian Youth on the dole' in A. Brah. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London Routledge

case of a teacher; or completing the piece-work quota for the day in the case of a 'homeworker') had been completed²⁸.

Our interviews with 'homeworkers' support the evidence from other studies which points to low wages, insecurity of employment, boredom and isolation, unbearable pressures resulting from sudden deadlines imposed at short notice by suppliers, and overall lack of employment protection, as characteristic features of 'homeworking'²⁹. This should not be taken to imply, however, that women working at employers' premises considered themselves as being better off. Indeed, several women working outside the home in low-waged, non-unionised sectors of the economy complained bitterly about conditions of work. Any attempts at unionisation of the workforce, they said, could result in dismissal. Fear of 'the sack' was a powerful deterrent against collective action. As one woman put it:

They treat you like animals but everyone fears the sack because you can't get a job that fast.

Poor working conditions - whether associated with 'homeworking' or with work carried out from employers' premises - were deplored across the board. Women condemned such conditions even though they may have no option themselves but to accept such employment through necessity and lack of available options.

Overall, 'homeworking' was regarded by the women as the least favoured form of paid work. They described it as sheer drudgery and exploitation. They saw it as reinforcing social isolation and leading to loneliness, and in some cases to acute forms of depression. Correspondingly, low-skilled forms of 'factory work' or non-manual work were also met with little enthusiasm, although they were generally preferred over homeworking. Women wanted 'good jobs with decent pay' and a creative and positive working environment. Yet they possessed a fairly realistic assessment of the limited range of jobs available to the majority of Asian women. Living in working-class areas of decaying urban centres, women were fully aware of the limitations of the local labour market. They spoke of how 'home-working', certain types of factory work, or at best, low-skilled low-paid non-manual work in the service sector had become the norm for Asian girls in the minds of local employers, teachers, education and guidance advisers, as well as among sections of the Asian communities. There is not the space here to discuss our respondents'

28. see case studies in A. Brah and S. Shaw (1992) *Working Choices; South Asian Young Muslim Women and the Labour Market*, London: Department of Employment, Research Paper No.91.

29. cf. L. Bisset and U. Huws (1984) *Sweated Labour: Homeworking in Britain Today*, Pamphlet No.33, London: Low Pay Unit; S. Allen and C. Wolkowitz (1987) *Homeworking: Myths and Realities*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education; A. Phizacklea (1990) *Unpacking the Fashion Industry*, London: Routledge.

experiences of education, the Government Training Schemes, and the education and training guidance services. Suffice is to say that the young women reported low expectations and stereotypic perceptions of Asian girls, their aspirations, abilities and parental cultures, on the part of educational professionals. The professional gaze in which a young Muslim woman is always an object rather than a subject of her own destiny was seen by our interviewees as a major obstacle to Asian girls' success in the labour market.

Racism and discrimination were cited as another huge barrier to entry and success in the labour market:

Racism is a problem. It is easier for white people to get jobs. If a white person advertised a job he would probably want a white person to do it.

It is difficult for us. They give the white people jobs first and then us last.

There are some white people who do not like Asian people. When they see them on the streets they shout abuse and swear words. It makes me really angry. Some employers don't like to give jobs to Asians.

Contingent Positionality

It is clear from women's narratives that they are 'situated' differently and differentially across a variety of discourses. While some women endorse a woman's rights to employment and thereby pose a challenge to patriarchal notions of the male as breadwinner, other women's narratives reiterate patriarchal values. There was no direct correspondence between, on the one hand, their views on women's participation in the labour market as a desirable and desired general goal and, on the other hand, individual women's own involvement in paid forms of work. The latter was circumscribed by such aspects as the form and extent of their caring responsibilities, the financial circumstances of the household, the structure of opportunities available through the local market, encouraging/discouraging attitudes on the part of relations/teachers/employment advisers, and racism and racial discrimination in employment. But the point is that women's experience is not unmitigated uni-directional 'oppression', nor are their narratives a straightforward codification of 'social orientation' waiting to 'burst out' as voluntaristic agency.

Rather, the narratives 'perform' variable modalities of subjectivity as the site of 'social' and 'psychic' simultaneity of positionality. Women's views about paid employment narrate articulating but distinctive and differentiated gender identities. As previously discussed, identity may be understood as that process whereby the instability and contradiction of the subject-in-process is signified as having stability and coherence as a 'core' which is enunciated as the 'I'. The 'I' is non-identically but relationally installed as the 'we' across the discursive space of subjectivity and institutional power and practice. In this sense, the collective agency of the

women we interviewed was deeply marked by different political subject positions, but not necessarily those which neatly fit certain received notions of the 'political', where political agency signals a certain kind of 'consciousness' and a certain kind of 'action'. By placing a strong emphasis on the importance of women having access to well-paid jobs with good working conditions, our respondents articulated a gendered discourse of social equity and justice. As we have seen, some of these young women were not 'economically active' themselves, but they persisted in the pursuit of everyday strategies that would facilitate and strengthen the opening up of socially just options for women, even if, as in their own cases, such a goal had to be deferred for a generation and achieved through daughters, or partially gained by supporting friends or female relatives. Women who already held jobs created cultural spaces where the pleasures of sociality could be experienced in the everyday minutiae of life in the workplace. Paid work embodied all the contradictions of class, gender, ethnicity and racism as women sought to balance the 'double-shift' of combining domestic responsibilities with a job. In their varying capacity either as 'homeworkers', workers in low-waged occupations on employers' premises, or doing various clerical, managerial and professional jobs, women came face-to-face with gendered forms of radicalised class exploitation. Their everyday life world whispered myriad configuration of power relations.

Overall, the young women's relationship to the labour market was constructed by a multiplicity of discourses and institutional practices, such as the impact of the global and the national economy on the local labour markets; discourses about women's suitability for caring responsibilities and women's own positionality in such discourses - how they might 'feel' and 'think' about them; the role of education in the social construction of gendered job aspirations, and racism. In other words, 'structure', 'culture' and 'agency'; the social and the psychic are all implicated. They are all integral to the framework I have outlined.

Source:

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Culture and Identity

Amartya Sen

Whatever we understand and enjoy in human progress instantly becomes ours, wherever it might have its origins.

Identity is a subject which needs some reflection because I believe that certain things are taken for granted in this subject which do not, by any means, survive the scrutiny. This is not in any way to deny the importance of identity in our lives. It affects our actions, governs the loyalties that we have, the tides that we respect. It affects our reflections. It affects the way that we see ourselves. But it's also the source of a lot of our problems.

We live in a divisive world today, and a lot of battles are fought on identity. Some countries themselves have been party to many of these disputes in the past, and they continue across the world today. We are involved in strongly divisive identities of various kinds and that is at the level of politics, nationalism, sectarian differences and so forth.

On the abstract level, in terms of cultural and literary studies, just to give an example, the issue of identity in a big way defines the nature of the literary commitments that people have across the world. On the one side there is the kind of fear that the non-Western cultures and literatures may be overwhelmed by the dominance that we see coming from the West. On the other side, some people find the cultural separatist position that is often taken in this rather self-consciously anti-colonial literature to be also tremendously historically constrained. The colonial heritage, which gave us very good reason to be critical of the West and to assert our independence, has continued to dominate our thought, even though India has been independent now for 50 years. The anti-colonial psychology, I think, is very strong and we have to examine how much of it is still justified and how much should be rejected in the world in which we live.

For Indians, the issue of identity is a problem even more than for an average member of the world's population. India has some special features. First of all, the country is very diverse, very complex. I can think of no other country which has as much diversity of language groups, religious groups, local cultures, political convictions, literary traditions, classical

backgrounds and various alternative traditions, Sanskrit, old Persian, Arabic, and so on.

All these differences, nestled side by side, are quite significant as a fact about India. Just to recount the nature of the religious diversity, India has more Hindus than any other country in the world, more sects than any other country, more languages than any other country, and more religions than any other country. It is the third largest Muslim country in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan. It is the country of origin of Buddhism, even though Buddhism is not practised as widely in India.

When I was in my very anti-religious school days, I tried to establish in my school records that I was a Buddhist, because when I first tried to put down that I had no religion, I was told by my headmaster that no religion was not a possible answer to the question. So I put down Buddhism because that was the only religion I could think of which did not require as much submissiveness. My headmaster called me in and asked if I would be disturbed by the fact that there were no other Buddhists within 300 miles around. I said it didn't disturb me in the least.

But even though Buddhism as a religion has declined in India, India is the country of its origin, and one has to only go through Buddhist literature to see how profound its connection is with Indian thought. Of course some of the influences of Buddhism survive today. It is not often recognized that there was essentially no vegetarianism in India before the Buddhist period, and that Indian vegetarianism is really a heritage of Buddhist convictions. In some parts of the country, like Bengal, where I come from, the Buddhist kings ruled until about the Eleventh century, so the gap between the Buddhist kings and the Muslim kings is a very thin one.

Thus in many ways it is still present with us, and, of course, you also ought to assert that India has had Christianity longer than Britain has had ... from the 4th century AD. There is a tradition claiming that Thomas the Apostle came to India. Whether or not that is true, there are some records from 4th century AD of Christians in India. Jews came to India shortly after the fall of Jerusalem. Thus, we have a very long tradition of diversity, which is very important to assert in this context.

The second reason why identity issues are complex and important is the presence of us, expatriate Indians across the world. They represent a very large group, which is not only large numerically, but it is often quite influential in local communities. It is also a community where the identity of origin is very influential.

There is a kind of hardiness about the Indian identity, which is important. It is even formalized into categories as in the category of Non Resident Indian. I don't know of similar categories of Non Resident Kurds, Non Resident Iranians, etc., but in our eyes it is a very established category and it has a kind of definite legal status. It is an engulfing identity and the

law so defines it. If you marry someone, whether or not that person happens to be from India, they are immediately classified according to Indian law as non resident Indians, which my wife, with great pleasure, learned when she was trying to get an Indian visa. She was told since she was an Indian origin foreigner, she could get a five year visa, which was wonderful since she was born in London and had no connection with India before marriage. So, it is not only a surviving identity but an absorbing identity, which is important to mention.

But there is another reason why this issue is important. India also belongs to Asia. Quite often in the context of cultural contrasts, claims are made on behalf of Asia that we have to scrutinize and understand and subject to critical examination. One of them that comes up often is the claim that Asian values are "somehow hostile to democracy and human rights." In truth in India, not just since independence, but even before independence, the whole Indian national movement has been committed to democracy and the problems of pluralism and tolerance. It is very important for us to examine whether we accept this way of interpreting Asian values, which also mean Indian values, since we are a major part of that population. So all these questions bring up, for Indians in particular, the question of identity as a very essential one in our lives.

I would like to make a few claims. First of all, one of the things that Indian history teaches us (it is not the only source from which we learn, but it certainly is one of the major sources) is the fact that identity need not be seen in unique terms. It is fundamental that we all have many identities. We have a very strong identity because of our citizenship and nationality. We could have strong commitments to regional loyalties, we could have commitments to language groups and cultures. We could have an identity connected with our community and religious backgrounds. We could have identities of friendship and other commitments of political beliefs and so on.

I think that part of the difficulty of identity politics is in the presumption that only one identity is permitted. I think that is a great mistake. In my more ambitious days, I was trying to look at the issue of identity widely. I was even trying to work out to what extent you could define an individual as an intersection of a variety of identities, which might not uniquely define a person but might get very close to defining that person in terms of all his characteristics. In fact, we can see how one can attempt it, which is perhaps just amateur philosophy. If you describe a person, you describe certain features: where she comes from, her nationality, her gender, her language, her cultural background and her history. Now each of these characteristics belong to a group. Looking at the intersection of these groups, do I arrive at this person's description?

Thus, I think the first, and perhaps the most important thing to emphasize is that identity is not a unique feature and that to assert one

identity is not to deny another, because it is the coexistence of various identities that make us what we are. In the Indian context, this is a particularly important. It is almost a characteristic feature of the idea of India. And the claim here is that we have separateness, which are these separate identities, but it is a question of how intensely conscious we are of how hostile the other group is. Mann, in describing his own identity (in the lectures he gave in Oxford in the thirties), describes himself as coming from the confluence of Hindu, Islamic and British culture, because he is a part of the heritage that he himself had got, and he could have gone on to describe other features like language groups and so on. So I believe this is the first issue to be asserted, since we see so much of the identity discussions assuming that asserting identity must involve denying other identities.

The second point, is that we should not think of some of the positive aspects of our identity as being fragile. I think the assumption of fragility has done great damage, a lot of harm to our ability to absorb things from elsewhere and still retain a broader sense of our identity.

We sometimes underestimate the extent to which cultures absorb. Let's take post-colonial trends in contemporary literature. There is a tendency to assume that they need to be separate worlds where the Western world is one safe place and other worlds are separate and cannot survive without banishing Western culture.

But that is not the way cultures ever developed. Just to give an example, think about how Indian culture generally has benefited immensely from interaction with the world. Indian drama was transformed by contact with Greek drama, and some of the world views in the art of dramatics in India are clearly of Greek origin. Literature has been strongly influenced by things happening elsewhere. We cannot even understand fully the medieval and mystical Hindu literature without looking at Muslim Sufi influences on it, the interactions with it, which are very strong.

If you look at even the art of cooking - the distinctive feature of Indian cooking is thought to be the food being hot and the liberal use of chillies. But chillies were unknown in India until the Portuguese brought it. And yet, when we think about Indian food being hot, we don't think of it as a Western product. We think that is the nature of Indian cooking. It doesn't make it any less Indian that the Portuguese brought it to us. That is also true, of course, in other countries as well. I'm very impressed to find examples of how much Indian food has taken over Britain. It is the largest variety of ethnic food - including English - that is served in Britain. An interesting note is that the British tourism brochures now tout that the authentic British food is curry.

So with some things, when the circle is completed, we are not quite clear on the origin of them. Just to give you another example of a complex origin, this one from mathematics, when Western trigonometry was

introduced in India, there was a lot of discussion as to whether we should use Western terminology or whether we should use Sanskrit and Bengali terms for it. I studied in a Bengali school so I studied all these in Bengali terms. But sometimes when these thoughts come to us, we learn how to recognize how much they have migrated. Knowledge is such a collaborative activity that to take this kind of very separated view is not a sustainable tradition. Therefore, I believe that the fragility assumption is often very mistaken.

A lot of people in India are irritated by the invasion of MTV. And there are moments when one might take just that view. But I think to take a view that this is a threat to Indian culture is a mistake. The fear of the foreign, the fear of invasion is something which has become so dominant today that one really has to diffuse it.

Let me return to the question that I referred to earlier, the issue of Asian values. What we mean by Asian values is mostly Asian culture. That applies not just to the Indian subcontinental part of Asia, it also applies to Far East itself. Quite often what is called Asian values is nothing other than a kind of cosmetic reading of Confucianism. First of all, Confucianism is not the only part of Asian culture, and not the only part of Chinese culture. In fact, one has to only spend a little time in any museum, whether it is in Beijing or Taiwan, to recognize how much of the Chinese past is a Buddhist past.

There is no earlier discussion of the value of the universal tolerance than in the Buddhist writing, particularly in the writing from Ochuga. The 4th century BC writing in India on the subject of tolerance is very striking. Sometimes people make the mistake of identifying the politics of, say, Confucianism by attacking another group, and by not being tolerant of it we weaken the group to which we belong. Very essential to my belief is John Walters discussion of imperial justice and the nature of tolerance being part of what he called political liberalism.

So not only is it the case that Asian values are not intolerant of democracy and human rights, it may be exactly the opposite. We find some of the earliest discussions of the importance of tolerance and universal tolerance in Asia itself, in India particularly.

Identity is very important and it is right that we should think about it. But identity need not be seen in unique terms. It is a non-unique characteristic. It is a non-fragile characteristic. In fact, interaction happens to be enriching, rather than impoverishing. Along with the separateness of identity, we have to consider also the strength that is involved in tolerance. It is not a sign of weakness to have a sense of identity and yet to recognize other people's identity in non-hostile terms. It is something in which we have a long classical tradition to fall back on, which I would like to emphasize very much.

Whatever we understand and enjoy in human progress instantly becomes ours, wherever it might have its origin. And I think there is a really wide source in that and a source which has returned again and again in the subcontinent.

Source: Little India, August 98.

Constructing Identities - Culture, Women's Agency and the Muslim World

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Abstract

This paper looks at the intersecting dynamics of power and identity as they relate to the struggles for women's empowerment with special reference to the Muslim world and the experience of the international network for information, solidarity and support: Women Living Under Muslim Laws.

The Muslim world in context

Internationally, it has become quite fashionable to speak of living in a global village. The expression is usually intended to positively express the linkages now established throughout the world, the similarities of issues confronting the different people who inhabit it and our ability, therefore, to connect with one another. If the expression implies a sense of collective responsibility, more pragmatically, it describes the integration of the world's economies into a global system that, on inspection, does indeed resemble a village, particularly those in the South that I know best. Like most villages, it is characterised by deep structural imbalances between men and women, between different castes and ethnic groups (in the global village, states and sub-state groups), between the elite decision-makers and those bereft of power and influence in which democratic norms are all too often circumscribed by the underlying inequalities in access to resources, information and power. Yet, the manner in which the term "global village" is used carries with it a clear - though unarticulated - invitation to people to shed their "parochial" identities to become citizens of the world. In reality our global village is increasingly plagued by violent conflicts directly linked to issues and assertions of identity at the state and sub-state levels, most gruesomely epitomised in ex-Yugoslavia and Rwanda. While much of the politics of identity is related to ethnicity, under certain circumstances, the fault lines of ethnicity are or become defined along the lines of religion so that ethnicity and religion merge. In Sri Lanka, for example, the ethnically differentiated Muslim population in Sri Lanka today is seen and views itself as a separate "ethnic" group (see Ismail 1995). Clearly, therefore the world's citizens are not quite ready to abandon smaller entities to define their

collective identity. Amongst other reasons, the world is probably too large and impersonal an entity to enable an individual to relate to it in the same manner that s/he relates to a smaller community that allows for direct personal interaction and identification with its members. Nor, on the whole, do people perceive the world as an undifferentiated mass of individuals. In the last ten to fifteen years, the frequency with which I have been asked to speak on the topic of "the women's movement in the Muslim world", or to elaborate on "the position and status of Muslim women" has increased. Given my association with a network called "Women Living Under Muslim Laws", these requests are understandable. Nevertheless, they still leave me feeling somewhat uncomfortable. Partly, because to do justice to such a vast topic would require a depth and breadth of scholarship which I do not presume to have, but partly also because the formulation of such requests implicitly over-determines the role of Islam in the lives of women while glossing over the complexities involved. The assumption of a uni-polar relationship between religion and women in the Muslim world is even more apparent in titles such as "Refuges in Islamic Societies", "Birth Control in the Islamic World", and "Islam, Women and Development". Such titles suggest that in matters relating women (whether this is a question of health, employment, crisis shelters or some other issue) a qualitative difference predicated on the presence or absence of Islam automatically separates women in Muslim communities from others (the problematic use of the term Islamic is discussed later). They imply a universality and uniformity that simply does not exist, and further that Muslims somehow manage to live in a world that is defined solely by a religious identity, is exclusive of all non-Muslims and that is insulated from any other social political or culturally relevant influences such as structures of power, the technological revolution, the culture of consumerism, etc. While references to the women's movement in a particular country or region run a similar risk of over-simplification, they have the advantage of referring to geographical locations - rather than to a presumed adherence to a faith - and therefore do not connote as uni-polar or as pre-determined a relationship. Moreover, I do not recall ever hearing references to the women's movement in the Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, or atheist worlds, even though religion is an issue addressed by women activists and academicians interested in the dynamics of gender and culture. Consequently, when reference is made to "the women of the Muslim world," I cannot help but ask myself which women in which world are being referred to? Chechnya or Fiji, South Africa or Turkey, Indonesia or Lebanon, India or the United States? The list is a fairly long and complicated one. The approximately 1.2 billion persons who make up the "Muslim world" are divided by class and social structures, political systems, cultures, ethnic and racial identities, natural, technological and economic resources, and differing histories to mention only the more obvious dividing lines. Women in this "world" spanning many continents, are themselves neither uni-dimensional entities defined

exclusively by their sex or by their religious identity, nor are they silent and passive victims. Instead like women everywhere, women in Muslim communities are “fully fledged actors, bearing the full set of contradictions implied by their class racial and ethnic locations as well as gender” (Kandiyoti 1994, 8). In combination with personal influences, such contradictions determine many of their personal and political choices including the level of importance that each woman accords religion in her personal, social and political life. Similarly, the essential components of patriarchy in a Muslim society are no different from those found elsewhere and women’s subordination occurs at multiple levels: in the immediate structures of family and kinship, in state-building projects, and also at the level of international policy-making. The subordination is visible regardless of whether religion is a player or not since policies such as the structural adjustment programmes, which are undoubtedly religion-neutral, nevertheless produce a gendered impact whether in the Muslim world or elsewhere. These structures and the issues they raise link the women (and the men) in the Muslim world struggling for women’s human rights to the global women’s movement and the human rights agenda. If the term “women’s movement” is meant to refer to a cohesive entity, then it is not possible to speak of a women’s movement in the Muslim world.

Modulated by a complex web of influences, women’s responses to their local situations in the Muslim world and their survival strategies are as diverse as their realities. Their strategies range from theological interpretations to a radical rejection of religion, from individual strategies of personal assertion and career development to armed struggle. Some put primacy on class struggle, others on ethnic identities, yet others on preserving the status quo. Many identify with the larger global women’s movement that itself consists of multiple strands and tendencies, others reject such integration.

Indeed, the diversities are so pronounced that they beg the question of whether the term ‘the Muslim world’ - that refers to such an amorphous, divergent, shifting composition of individuals and societies (not infrequently in conflict with one another) that comprise it - is at all meaningful? Yet, where it is true that the patriarchal structures and attendant discriminatory practices flowing from this are similar in and outside the Muslim world, it is equally true that, to the extent that religion is a salient feature in people’s self-definitions and culture, religion does influence the contours of women’s lives and the scope for their self-assertions. In much of the Muslim world Islam is an everyday reality for people. It is integral to how they define themselves as a society with the consequence that the cultural articulation of patriarchy is mostly expressed (and justified) by reference to Islam even though Islam itself may be defined differently in different societies.

The attitudes and practices of the adherents of Islam vary with ethnic and class identity, and with sect. Additionally, in each society Islam bears

the unmistakable imprint of the regional culture and of traditions that either pre-date Islam or have been absorbed through subsequent developments and influences. It is important to underline, therefore, that while Islam undoubtedly does make a difference to the mode of oppression and also resistance in Muslim societies, it does so in different ways in different societies and always in conjunction with the other facets of these societies. There are two other important factors which need to be borne in mind when considering women, identity and the Muslim world. First, almost without exception, the societies comprising "the Muslim world" share a history of colonisation or hegemonic rule and control.

Most became nation-states without the benefit of an historical evolution of a nation and all of them have had to grapple with the challenges posed by state-building burdened by the dislocation of indigenous socio-economic structures and cultural systems. In seeking to integrate the citizens of the state, political elites (themselves often ethnically and religiously distinct) have carefully selected "out of an infinite range of possible cultural identities that one ? as the political identity which offers the greatest scope of political success". (Taylor and Yapp 1979, x) It is when such states have pursued policies that, instead of promoting democratic rule and an equality of benefits and opportunities to the state's disparate regions and peoples, have deepened inequality between regions, urban and rural localities and discriminated against specific groups within the state, that those in power have sought to assert their own control and quell opposition - and those in opposition to mobilise people to gain state control or privileges - through an appeal to religious, regional or ethnic identity. Second, in the New World Order, the grounds of politics generally appear to have shifted away from defining the nature of the state and the appropriate socio-economic and political system, to trying to work out the best deal within the existing system.

This reinforces the tendency to make demands on the basis of identity rather than a well-articulated political agenda spelling out economic and social programmes. Articulating demands on the basis of identity leads to more and more rigidly defined markers of exclusivity that demarcates the boundaries between oneself and those who then become defined as the other, that other more and more being defined as hostile. For women, who are frequently made the repositories of culture, the issue of identity is crucial. Women's empowerment both challenges and is challenged by cultural and political issues of identity/identities: how identity is formed, who defines it, how definitions of gender fit into definitions of community and those of a collective and personal self, the interplay between definitions at the local, regional and international levels are of direct consequence to women wanting to redefine the parameters of their lives.

The dynamics underlying definitions of self, gender and collectivity are relevant everywhere since each society has to deal with three

incontrovertible and inescapable truths: birth, life, and the reality of two sexes. Consequently, gender definitions are necessarily a part of all cultures and as such are essential ingredients of the collective identity of any group. Hence, when women seek to expand their space as women by rejecting and re-defining the roles previously designated for them, they are in fact challenging more than “just” the contours of their own lives. If culture is an expression of a collective identity, and if all societies have to address the issue of gender, then re-definitions of gender automatically necessitate a readjustment of the broader culture and collectivity concerned, irrespective of whether the society in question is dynamic or stagnant, ancient or contemporary, atheist or religious, and of course, Muslim or non-Muslim.

The Creation of a Network

It is in the context of identity as control and identity as autonomously defined self-expression, that Women Living Under Muslim Laws was created as an international network that locates itself in the global struggle for women’s empowerment while addressing the issue of ‘the Muslim world’ with the aim of exposing the differences and underlying contradictions the term tends to plaster over and the dynamics of control that operate within it. The network is intended to provide a vehicle for mutual support between women struggling to expand their space and redefine their lives, while simultaneously recognising the diverse circumstances and factors that women confront and that influence their personal and political strategies for change.

Underlying the creation of the WLUML network, is an understanding of the way issues of women’s empowerment and the challenges women mount to patriarchal control intersect with issues of collective identities and the creative or inhibiting tension that may exist between individual women (and men) and their community through the controls that the collectivity exercises over its members. In this, the network works closely with other networks and groups of women throughout the world, including those addressing similar issues arising from the growth of new fundamentalisms of religion, ethnicity and totalitarian regimes (these include Women Against Fundamentalism, Catholics for a Free Choice, Communalism Combat, and numerous programmes and forums around issues of laws, customs and development such as the Women and Law in Southern Africa programme).

That the network, despite a somewhat cumbersome title formulated for conveying a specific meaning, is all too frequently understood in a collapsed - and inaccurate - form as a network of “Muslim women” or one concerned with “Islamic Law”, is symptomatic of the over-determined role of Islam and underscores the difficult nature of its central theme which is to challenge the myth of one monolithic Muslim world in which a single “Islamic” law prevails. In its name and work, the emphasis is on women themselves and their situations and not on the specific politico-religious

option they may exercise. Not all women affected by Muslim laws are Muslim. Many non-Muslim women are affected by the laws prevalent in a Muslim majority country irrespective of their religious affiliation, others have Muslim laws applied to them through marriage or their children, and some may not chose to identify themselves as Muslims at all, preferring other markers of political or personal identity.

The women linked through WLUML live in countries where Islam is the state religion and in Muslim communities ruled by religious minority laws; in secular states where a rapidly expanding political presence of Islam increasingly provokes a demand for religious law and in migrant Muslim communities in Europe, the Americas, and Australasia. The network has been shaped by the specific human rights advocacy campaigns that led to its creation and by the analysis and experience of the women (as also the men) involved in its work. The immediate catalyst was provided in 1984 by a number of un-related events in different parts of the world that each concerned women's rights, laws and Muslim communities.

In Algeria, three women had been jailed without trial for having discussed with others the contents of a new set of personal laws that would severely undermine women's rights. In India, a Muslim woman challenged the existing Muslim personal laws in the Supreme Court as being violative of the constitutional rights of Muslim women as citizens.

In Abu Dhabi, a pregnant Sri Lankan woman tried and found guilty of adultery was condemned to stoning to death two months after giving birth.

In Europe, the Mothers of Algiers (a group formed by women divorced from Algerian men) were seeking access to or custody of their children. Except for the woman condemned to death in Abu Dhabi, the others all sought and received international support for their local struggles and issues from within and outside the Muslim world.

Amongst the campaigners a feminist from the Muslim world saw in these international campaigns how potentially effective mutual support between women in the Muslim world could be in strengthening the local struggles of individuals and groups. She single-handedly set about creating links across countries and cultures to bring about such a system of support. At a feminist gathering in Amsterdam, she encountered a handful of other women from the Muslim world. It is unlikely that, at that time, these women saw themselves as such i.e. as "women from the Muslim world" since their commonality lay in a shared perspective of international feminism that had brought them to the meeting rather than their communities of origin. Be that as it may, in their collective discussions, the women rapidly arrived at the following set of conclusions that even today underpin the network's activities:

- 1) even though women's lives vary enormously from one Muslim context to another, each woman's life is undoubtedly influenced to a

greater or lesser extent by laws and customs said or perceived to be Islamic or Muslim in her own context; that customs are as essential and potent as ingredients of control over women as the law itself, and that for a variety of reasons, many non-Muslim women are also affected by these,

2) generally speaking, the interconnection between laws, culture and religion has been used by men and the state under various political regimes to maintain a patriarchal control over women; that recent years had marked an increased tendency of political forces in and out of office to formulate or make demands for legislation, policies and demands justified by reference to Islam which - amongst other things - undercut women's autonomy and rights; that whereas the underlying contest is not one of religion but a tussle for political power and pre-eminence, the political use of Islam often has a negative impact on women's ability to intervene for their rights, and that

3) women have actively struggled (as individuals and as groups) against both the traditional restrictions and the newly imposed ones but that they have usually been obliged by circumstances to carry out their struggles in isolation. This isolation amplifies their vulnerability and is an important factor that can constrain effective intervention and narrow the impact of their struggles.

As defined by the group, the challenge was not how to mobilise women affected by Muslim laws, but how to strengthen women's on-going struggles. The consensus was for the formation of a network that would help break women's isolation by providing information, solidarity and support and yet have the fluidity and flexibility needed to ensure the autonomy of each person or group in formulating priorities and strategies based on their own understanding of their particular circumstances.

The fluidity of a network, makes it possible to bring together diverse and divergent opinions and experiences around a common goal, providing insights and generating new ideas and strategies. Importantly, networks can do this without any compulsion to impose homogeneity amongst those involved or to exercise any control over the personal and/or political choices made by them.

The commonality within the WLUML network is defined internally by analysis and goals and externally by having to grapple with a patriarchal system traditionally justified by reference to Islam. This commonality is tempered however by an understanding that individual women will have different strategies and priorities when challenging their oppression; that the choice made by one may not be the best choice for another, or even a choice at all. Consequently the network is able to bring together women who define their struggle in exclusively secular terms as well as those who

prefer to work from within the framework of religion to share and learn from each other despite their differences.

Of Collective and Personal Identities -The Mechanisms of Control to a Woman's Identity

The network purposively uses the word "Muslim" rather than "Islamic" to underscore that laws in fact are made by men and are not pre-ordained, and the plural "laws", rather than a singular "law", to convey both the complex nature of the issues involved as well as the diverse realities confronting women. First, the laws classified as Muslim vary - sometimes radically - from one country to another. Second, a number of countries have two or more officially recognised formal sets of laws: civil, religious (e.g. India, Philippines) and customary (e.g. Senegal). Each of these may provide or deny women different rights. Most relate to personal status law. In some places couples have a choice to register their marriage under one or the other (Sri Lanka, Senegal), in others the parallel laws preclude personal choices (Pakistan). Third, and perhaps most importantly, in addition to however many parallel formal laws may exist, informal customs and traditions operate in every society which can be as, if not more, important that the formal laws in controlling women's lives.

For the purpose of the network, these customs are considered to be uncodified laws, and included in the rubric "laws". In each society, the corpus of formal and informal laws - particularly in the area of personal and family matters critical to gender definitions - in large measure defines in women's everyday lives what is possible and what is improbable (not to say impossible) at the personal, community, and national levels. Whether formal or informal, by prescription and by omission laws project an ideal for society and it is in projecting this ideal that the cultural rooting and definitions of a collective self become visible in both statutory law as well as customary practice. In this sense "Muslim laws" extend well beyond the strict parameters of "laws" in personal and family matters to govern the relationship of individuals with the socio-economic and political environment in which they are concentrically located. The formal laws themselves are rarely gender-neutral in either the text of the law or in its application.

Moreover, laws display a disproportionate focus on gender as part of cultural identity. Even a cursory review of legislation in most parts of the Muslim world shows that the scope of Muslim jurisprudence (or shari'ah) is severely restricted. The bulk of legislation pertaining to matters such as commerce, revenues/taxes, administrative matters, public service, or other public sectors such as banking, standing armies, or political structures, consists of laws and regulations either inherited from the ex-colonial power or adopted from elsewhere.

In sharp contrast, laws governing personal and family matters are regulated almost universally through Muslim jurisprudence and justified by reference to Islamic injunctions. But the emphasis on personal status law (that has the most immediate consequences for gender-relations) as a key component of community identity is not limited to Muslim majority states. Many states in the South have maintained personal laws for different communities. This is usually presented as a measure allowing space for ethnic/religious minorities to retain their cultural identity. That such an arrangement may be at the expense of the women of that community has rarely been of concern.

Moreover, discourses relating to gender have almost inevitably accompanied conflicts of power and, for example, gender has been a key component of colonial and post-colonial discourses (see Leila Ahmed 1992 on the Middle East, Lata Mani 1989 and Zoya Hasan 1994 on South Asia).

For their part, the power of customary practices or informal laws can be gauged by the absence in most countries of legal restrictions on women's apparel, women's mobility, or women's entry in specific fields of education or employment. The lack of legislation has not, however, prevented women's lives from being circumscribed in all these fields in Muslim and non-Muslim societies alike. These constraints are imposed through a culturally specific process of socialisation that takes place in every community and in which girls/women (and boys/men) are taught and internalise a fairly complex set of rules of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This social code ends up being obeyed either automatically through self-censorship or from a fear of some physical or other forms of reprimand that a digression from the norm will entail.

Much like the law, ignorance is rarely an excuse and the punishment for transgressions of these unwritten but binding codes can be severe. The impact of such unwritten laws is disproportionately felt in the areas where gender is defined and experienced. Tove Bolstad, a Norwegian feminist, views such "informal laws" as "rules which are adhered to because they are perceived as a moral duty and because they may be sanctioned by, for instance, some people becoming angry if such duties are not fulfilled. Such informal regulations arise steadily in semi-autonomous spheres. Family life ...is precisely such an area". (Bolstad 1995, 26-27)

Speaking of the enormous force of these customs in the context of Norway which, arguably, has some of the most gender-neutral formal laws, she says: "[a]ll cultures contain spheres in which it is impossible for the members 'to think that they are thinking wrongly' - things are obvious, self-evident and natural. These are implicitly areas of silence, of inarticulation, arenas into which language does not intrude or in which it is forbidden to speak". (Bolstad 1995, 7) In those societies where religion continues to operate as an important force in people's lives, it usually provides an overarching umbrella for definitions of the collective self and the likelihood is

that the prevalent customary practices will be presented and accepted as being inherently religious even if, in fact, they are diametrically opposed to the religious doctrine in question. As such it becomes even more impossible for women to question existing practices, to "think that they are thinking wrongly".

In the Muslim context, the internalisation of all customs as having religious sanction and approval has now been amply documented in a number of the 18 country projects mapping customary practices, the laws and women's initiatives undertaken as part of the WLUML "Women and Law In the Muslim World" action-research programme.

The specific laws governing personal and family matters delineate the boundaries within which a Muslim woman can hope to define her own identity. Precisely because personal/family laws are so consistently labelled "Muslim" and justified with reference to Islamic doctrine or culture, in each particular - and often very varied - cultural context, the identity/space defined for women is put forward as that of a "Muslim woman". A person who challenges any aspect of law relating to family or personal matters is therefore deemed to be refuting - or at the very least challenging - the very definition of Muslim womanhood in her own setting.

The threads of religion and custom are so tightly interwoven that, for example, where it is practised amongst Muslims, female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) is considered to be a religious act. This, despite the fact that where it exists, it is practised by non-Muslims and Muslims alike and that FGM is unknown to the majority of Muslim communities, who not only have never heard of it, but are frequently shocked at the thought that it is deemed to be even remotely Islamic. Nevertheless, for women living in communities that practise FGM, challenging FGM is equivalent to challenging religious doctrine. On the other hand, the Gambia Women and Law team indicated how exposure to and knowledge of the existence of other Muslim women who do not practice FGM provoked women to question the existence of FGM in their own community, breaking the taboo of thinking the unthinkable.

There are of course many more, if less striking, examples of such differences within the Muslim world underlining the extent to which insularity keeps people ignorant of how alien the local "Islamic" practices taken for granted in one's own cultural context can appear to others from within the Muslim world (e.g. women from the Middle East never cease to be amazed that Muslims in South Asia should have such a widespread practice of dowry).

In certain aspects of women's lives, the formal law may be the dominant factor of control, in others the uncodified "laws" internalized by women, and maintained through social pressure, may have a greater impact. Nevertheless it is painfully clear is that whenever an option is provided by a

conflict between religious doctrine, customary practices or state law, the one least favourable to women, offering them the least rights is the one that will actually be implemented, a tendency signaling the over-riding importance of patriarchal concerns in the control of women, rather than religious or other considerations. (see Mayer 1996 on the Maghreb) This can be illustrated by taking examples from Pakistan (which I am more familiar with) where variously customs have been preferred over religious doctrine, or religious doctrine over formal law. In the matter of immovable property, British colonial laws had deprived Muslim women of their religiously sanctioned right to own and inherit property (this was justified by reference to existing Hindu customs, but significantly, on being challenged with respect to Muslims, it was justified by the British colonial rulers by reference to the fact that British women did not enjoy this right) (Mumtaz & Shaheed 1987).

Today, after fifty years of independence women continue to be deprived of inheritance by reference to local customs despite the earlier law having been a non-Muslim colonial law that negated rights granted by religion and despite its subsequent amendment to grant women this right by reference to Islamic doctrine.

On the other hand, in matters of divorce, the formal law is flouted by reference to religious interpretations. Where the formal state law rejects oral repudiation as a legitimate procedure for a Muslim man divorcing his wife, this is socially practised and accepted by reference to Islam even though the formal law itself is also derived from Muslim jurisprudence.

Finally, Punjabi communities traditionally dealt with adultery through a combination of forced marriage, social ostracization, and public humiliation. These practices have now been displaced by the introduction in 1979 of a supposedly Islamic law regulating extra-marital intercourse that provides for imprisonment, flogging, fines and - under certain circumstances - stoning to death. In this instance, customs have been abandoned in favor of the formal law that both violates human rights and discriminates against women.

Another vivid illustration from Pakistan of the exercise of the worst option for women is the occurrence of polygyny (albeit rarely) amongst poor Christians who have assimilated this from their predominantly Muslim environment. In contrast, the Christian community has, so far, failed to be influenced by the more liberal grounds for divorce that exist for the Muslim majority community with greater rights for women, making divorce virtually impossible for Christians (the sole acceptable ground being adultery, which however exposes those seeking divorce to the current laws regarding adultery mentioned above).

Identity and the Wider Political Arena

Further complicating the issue of religion, women and rights is the use of religion in the political arena. As stated at the beginning of this paper, the concept of one homogeneous Muslim world is a myth. Further, while it is not uncommon to hear of a state, society or community referred to as being "Islamic" (regardless of whether this is an external or internal label), the fact remains that it is not Islamic (implying something ordained by religious scriptures) only Muslim (i.e. comprised of people who adhere to Islam).

Today, when a religious idiom is increasingly visible in the political discourse of so many Muslim communities, it is particularly important to insist on this distinction and also to place the ever more strident claims and counter-claims of being the only true mantle-bearers of Islam in their proper context which is the contest for political power. In reality, these claims and the often violent dynamics they entail, have little to do with religion. It is just that political parties and groups have found it expedient to use a religious idiom to express and mobilise support for their political agendas. Such politico-religious groups also find it convenient to cite so-called Islamic laws already being applied in different Muslim countries in support of their own demands for more stringent, essentially undemocratic or discriminatory "Islamic" laws, that amongst other things usually militate against the rights of women and minorities.

Against this background, viewing the problems facing women in Muslim societies as being derived uniquely from Islam and their identity as Muslims is more than merely unfortunate. It impedes an understanding of the structural inequalities; it belittles the efforts of those who are striving for change within their societies - sometimes at the cost of their lives, more often of their freedom; it clouds the different political and social forces that are often in conflict in the relevant countries or regions, and, finally, it puts Muslims as a whole on the defensive, thereby blocking the potential for self-critical analysis leading to growth and change. In global terms it counter-poses a religion to systems and structures and plays into the hands of those these days who pose as self-proclaimed mantle-bearers of Islam. In an article examining the counter-posing of Islam and democracy, Fatima Mernissi says: "Few words in contemporary political and ideological lexicons have been as misused, and abused, as 'Islam' by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The term, meaning peace and submission, now invokes images of violence, totalitarianism, and irrationality. Speculation on the chances for peace in the Middle east usually centers on an embarrassingly racist question: are Islam and democracy compatible? The question? reduces a set of complex, multifaceted, and global contradictions between Muslim and Western states to an opposition between medieval religion and a modern political system..[and] assigns rationality to democracy and irrationality to Islam." (1995, 33) This is not very different from having meetings to discuss "Islam, Women and Development" that suggest that

development is dependent on religious faith rather than on the capacity of states to govern, deliver on the social contract and negotiate in the international market; on the presence and strength of institutions of civil society; on the political configuration of contests of power.

In part the network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) came about in response to what women activists were experiencing as a pincer movement: pressure from retrogressive elements and groups seeking to monopolize the political discourse and impose their version of “Muslim womanhood” and Muslim society within our own communities and countries on the one hand and, on the other, being put on the defensive either by the too facile association of Islam with irrationality, fanaticism and misogyny by the non-Muslim world in general, or by the attack on one’s community by another within the same country. Perceptions as well as the real experiences of belonging to a community under attack make it that much more difficult to raise one’s voice against discrimination and oppression within the community. Therefore taken together the internal and external pressures induced and encourage silence and undermine initiatives for change. The primacy accorded religion in the case of the Muslim world both by outsiders and those vying for power, often by violent means, erodes the women’s ability to assert themselves by diverting attention from issues of structures and systems that help keep women subordinate and by giving currency to the idea that there is a single way of being a woman in a Muslim environment, bolstering the notion of the Muslim woman. In the words of the WLUML network:

“Interaction and discussions between women from different Muslim societies have shown us that while some similarities exist, the notion of a uniform Muslim world is a misconception imposed on us... Our different realities range from being strictly closeted, isolated and voiceless within four walls, subjected to public floggings and condemned to death for presumed adultery (which is considered a crime against the state) and forcibly given in marriage as a child to situations where women have far greater degree of freedom of movement and interaction, the right to work, to participate in public affairs and also exercise a far greater control over their own... We have erroneously been led to believe that the only possible way of ‘being’ is the one we currently live in each of our contexts. Depriving us of even dreaming of a different reality is one of the most debilitating forms of oppression we suffer..” (1986, 5)

Breaking the Isolation of Women

Dreaming of an alternative reality is not merely a matter of inspiration. To even conceive of different realities, women must first question the given parameters of their current lives, amongst other things by unravelling the composite strands of the current identity imposed on them as integral whole. Only then can they hope to find or create the space in which to

imagine new self-definitions. Information on the law as well as on the sources of law and customary practices and on the political and social forces that determine women's current reality can facilitate this process.

A primary task of the WLUMML network is thus to try and ensure that women affected by Muslim laws and customs have access to this type of information by systematically collecting and disseminating information on the laws of different countries, highlighting the differences between laws and customs and demystifying the sources of each. Equally important is to share information about the strategies women have individually and/or collectively devised to expand their space and rights, to share experiences of struggles and the discussions and debates that flow from these which inspire by example or insight, or alternatively indicate what may not work.

To act upon these dreams of course requires a different set of support systems to be in place. WLUMML addresses this through its solidarity and support actions. These fall into two distinct categories: international human rights campaigns in instances where women's rights are threatened, or violated either as an individual or because of a general law or policy that exists or is being proposed (similar to those that catalysed the network's formation). Though this type of lobbying (alerts for action) and human rights campaigns are now fairly regular features of numerous human rights groups, when WLUMML started there were few institutions that ran such campaigns other than Amnesty International. In any case, Amnesty's specific framework for intervention largely excluded the types of issues on which WLUMML ran its campaigns. The other type of solidarity interventions carried out by WLUMML go beyond international campaigns to provide immediate assistance to individual women whose child may have been abducted, whose family may be attempting to impose a forced marriage, or whose very life may be threatened because of either her actions or opinions.

Such interventions include identifying and mobilising lawyers and support groups across countries and continents, facilitating access to shelters, doctors and social workers, not to mention moral and emotional support to the person and her family. In this sense the network functions as a safety net at least for some women attempting to redefine their lives either politically or personally. Beyond the immediate relief such actions provide to the individuals and groups concerned, the very knowledge that such support is available, opens a window of potential change for others. In this as in much of its work, WLUMML works closely with women's rights groups throughout the world, and consciously works to build and strengthen links of women across national and religious boundaries.

Demonstrating that a global women's movement does, indeed, exist, the support received and provided by WLUMML in solidarity actions and other aspects of its activities slices across boundaries and other barriers that may distinguish but do not necessarily divide women activists. But perhaps what remains unique to the WLUMML network is the less tangible support it

provides with respect to people's psychological need to belong to a collectivity. When challenging "Muslim" laws is condemned within one's own community as a rejection of Islamic injunctions and the very concept of Muslim womanhood, and/or when challenging existing customs is condemned as a rejection of, or challenge to the very basis of a community's self-definition, those who dare to question existing laws and practices run the risk of at least ostracism, if not more severe punishments. (Similar mechanisms are used to maintain ethnic or other identity-based control over members of the community.) This is a formidable obstacle, for the fear of being pushed beyond the collectivity of one's nation, religion, and ethnic group - of losing one's identity - militates against women's self-assertion and initiatives for change. Under these circumstances, questioning, rejecting, or reformulating "Muslim" laws is an intimidating task especially for women who on the whole have the least political and economic resources, and also have the least voice in formulating cultural definitions of a collective self (including matters relating to law, customs and religion).

Consequently, if women can rely on the support of some collectivity that functions as an alternative reference group, it becomes far easier to initiate steps challenging what has traditionally being understood to be "Muslim laws" in one's own context. Where information on the diversity of existing laws and practices within the Muslim world lends material shape to alternatives, contacts and links with women from other parts of the Muslim world within and outside national boundaries - whose very existence speaks of the multiplicity of women's realities within the Muslim context - are a significant catalyst in releasing the creative energy of envisaging alternatives for oneself. The connections made and sustained through the network can therefore function as an alternative reference group(s) for the women it links. It is in opening the doors to a multiplicity of possible alternatives, that the WLUML network hopes to make its most important contribution by furnishing women with the information and the tangible and less tangible support they need to think the unthinkable, question what is taken for granted. and start assuming the right to define for themselves the parameters of their own identity and thereby that of their community - however that may be defined by them.

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What is your tribe ?: Women's struggles and the construction of Muslimness

M. A. Hélie-Lucas

Abstract

Using the often scarce space available to them in very different political circumstances, women's strategies in defence of their human rights range from entryism to internationalism.

While fundamentalists read all women's strategies as equally significant of betrayal of their identity, liberals outside Muslim countries and communities - and increasingly inside too - select the entryist strategy as the only legitimate one insofar as it matches our "nature".

While the women's movement remains united in standing for the need to use concomitantly or alternately all available strategies, for they are in complementarity and can be reciprocal, the liberal preference strengthens, in fact, the fundamentalist views on "Muslim" women's ontological specificities and would, if it succeeded, disempower and alienate women.

The first part of the strange title of this article originates in a personal experience. In 1962, after a seven year bloody war which made two million victims, Algeria became independent from French colonisation. Shortly after independence, some of us were being introduced, as Algerians, to some Left intellectuals in Paris who had been in favor of our liberation movement. To my utter surprise, they insisted on knowing not only our religion although all of them without any exception happened to be atheists, they just could not take the fact that we too professed no religion) but also, in their own words, our 'tribe of origin'. It was a shock and a revelation to me that, for those intellectuals, Third World people could not do with just citizenship: we had to bear the marks of exoticism. Our sameness was deeply disturbing to them. Moreover it was, in their views, challenging our very identity - a recently acquired national identity that we had fought for for so many years. The second part of my title refers to the dangerously growing trend of precisely constructing exoticism and Otherness in the political, thus reinforcing the ideology as well as the power and legi-

timacy of extreme right political forces, both within and outside Muslim contexts, colluding with each other.

Fundamentalism in context

Many well meaning people, outside as well as inside Muslim contexts, in good faith, play into the game of fundamentalists and their identity politics. There are many forms and varieties of fundamentalism, and for that reason I would rather speak of fundamentalisms. However, they have common characteristics. In particular, one key element of their politics is the control of women. This is true of all religious fundamentalisms: we can see it with the Christian Right in the US promoting their views of 'morality ' by assassinating medical personnel who perform abortions; it is true of Muslim Fundamentalists promoting gender apartheid in Iran, Sudan, Algeria and Afghanistan; it is true of Hindu BJP and RSS promoting sati (burning of wives alive on the pyre of their deceased husbands)...

The list will be long of other religious fundamentalists' anti-women stands, and of their hatred of women. Indeed, in a context of Islam bashing and racism, this is a much needed reminder that "Muslim fundamentalism", despite being specifically singled out in the international media, is no different in that respect from any other religious fundamentalism. Moreover, religious fundamentalisms cannot be isolated from other forms of fundamentalism which do not focus on religion, but do create ideological and political alliances with each other, such as fundamentalisms based on ethnicity and culture. For religious fundamentalism is not a religious movement, as it pretends to be. Religious pretexts, as in Ireland, are inevitably covering up much deeper infrastructural conflicts. Those are political movements, aiming at seizing political power, by force if not otherwise.

As an example, this is what the two main Algerian fundamentalist leaders, co-founders of the FIS party (Islamic Salvation Front) had to say, even long before the December 1991 elections were cancelled in Algeria, about their programme and democracy:

"I do not respect either the laws or the political parties which do not have the Qur'an. I throw them under my feet and I trample them. These parties must leave the country. They must be suppressed". (Ali Belhadj, Alger Républicain, April 5, 1991).

"Beware of those who pretend that the concept of democracy exists in Islam. Democracy is kofr" (Ali Belhadj, Le Matin October 29, 1989).

"There is no democracy because the sole source of power is Allah, through the Qur'an, and not the people. If people vote against the law of God, this is nothing but blasphemy. In this case, one must kill these unbelievers for the good reason that they want to substitute their authority to the authority of God "(Ali Belhaj, Horizons, February 29, 1989.).

“We do not accept this democracy which allows those who are elected to be in contradiction with Islam, Sharia, its doctrine and its values” (Abassi Madani, *Algérie Actualité*, December 24, 1989.)

Abhorrent of democracy, Algerian fundamentalist leaders inevitably advocate violence against those who stand for it: “All forward looking leaders should put all their potentialities to the service of the djihad (holy war) and coordinate all forms of djihad, including armed djihad which is its noblest and highest form” (Ali Belhadj, Open letter to Mudjahidin, October 2, 1994).

This position is confirmed in international media by the representative of FIS in Washington himself: “If the Islamic state in Algeria is not brought to power by dialogue, this will be done by the djihad”(Anouar Haddam, *Ennahar*, Beyrouth, Liban, November 1994). “It is true that we declared the djihad and we did so according to the fundamental principles of Islam”(Anouar Haddam, *El Tiempo*, Madrid , Spain, January 2, 1995).

The incompatibility between ‘Islam’ and human rights obviously does not stem from all Muslims believers, but from Muslim fundamentalists only. Claiming that they represent, if not the holy people by God chosen, then the purest and most excellent race, or the most ancient and elaborate culture, these movements, when they rise to power, impose their rules, codes of conducts, beliefs and principles on ‘subhuman’ races, ‘inferior’ cultures and other religions. Fundamentalisms are political movements of the extreme right, which, in a context of globalisation, i.e. forceful international economic exploitation and free-for-all capitalism, manipulate religion, culture or ethnicity, in order to achieve their political aims.

Rather than looking for examples in far off cultural and political contexts, in some exotic third world countries, one should identify the phenomenon at one’s doorstep. Europe had to face it recently with the ‘ethnic cleansing’ and expansionist policy of Serbian leaders in ex-Yugoslavia¹.

Fundamentalism is the form that fascism takes today. Like Nazism in Germany, it emerges in a context of economic crisis and pauperisation, builds itself on the discontent of the people, manipulates the poorer sections of the populations, exalts their moral values and their culture(aryanity for Germany, the glorious past of Rome for Italy), covers itself with the blessing of their God (‘Gott mit uns’, as the SS used to wear on their belts), wants to convert or submit the world, eliminates and eradicates their political opponents as well as the ‘untermensch’. Far from being obscurantists and economically backwards, fundamentalists are modernists and capitalists.

1. WLUML, ‘Compilation of informations on crimes of war against women in ex-Yugoslavia. Actions and initiatives in their defence’, 1992.

It is in this context that I shall come back to Muslim fundamentalists, women and human rights. This particular form of extreme right movement and its specific oppression of women should not be analyzed outside a global political frame such as the one I indicated here.

The myth of a homogeneous Muslim world

Women in Muslim countries and communities are indeed oppressed, in the name of religious interpretations that sustain and support patriarchy (Statement by 15 Muslim Scholars from India, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, the Sudan, Palestine, Syria and Turkey, from Free Inquiry, USA, October, 1997, reproduced in WLUML Dossier 19, 1997). However, there is no such thing as a uniform Muslim World, not a unique Islamic Law (Sharia) applied everywhere, and therefore women in Muslim societies lead very different lives, suffer different degrees of oppression, and enjoy different rights. "Our different realities range - from being strictly closeted, isolated and voiceless within four walls, subjected to public floggings and condemned to death for presumed adultery (which is considered a crime against the State) and forcibly given in marriage as a child, - to situations where women have a far greater degree of freedom of movement and interaction: the right to work, to participate in public affairs and also to exercise a far greater control over their own lives"².

This diversity in itself is sufficient to counter the fundamentalist ideology of Muslimness, as a belief, a way of life, a code of conduct, a "culture"³ that is supposed to characterize the life of so-called Muslims all over the world. Like all totalizations, it ignores differences of cultures, political regimes, classes, etc..., and proposes the oppressive vision of an unchallengeable, unchangeable, divinely defined homogeneity. But it exists nowhere else than in their imagination.

However, by insistently suggesting its existence, fundamentalists have managed to convince many Muslims and non Muslims of its (virtual?) reality. "It is often presumed that there exists one homogeneous Muslim world. Interaction and discussions between women from different Muslim societies have shown us that while some similarities exist, the notion of a uniform Muslim world is a misconception imposed on us. We have been led to believe erroneously that the only possible way of "being" is the way we currently live in each of our contexts. Depriving us of even dreaming of a different reality is one of the most debilitating form of oppression we suffer"⁴.

Differences in Muslim societies are due to three main factors. First of all, Islam has spread, over centuries, in many different cultures all over all

2. WLUML, Aramon Plan of Action, 1986.

3. Aziz El Azmeh. Muslim Culture and the European Tribe, in *Islams and modernities*, London Verso, 1993 and an extended version in WLUML Dossier 19, 1997.

4. WLUML. Aramon Plan of Action. 1986.

continents and it has absorbed local traditions; hence Female Genital Mutilation, although practiced by animists and Christians too in the concerned areas, is considered and promoted as Islamic in certain parts of Africa while unheard of elsewhere; veiling which originated in the semitic tradition -Jewish, Muslim and Christian alike- is now promoted the world over as the symbol of Islam, thus eradicating traditional dress codes; the caste system, originally Hindu, functions in Muslim communities as well in the Indian subcontinent.

Secondly, the Qur'an and hadith have been interpreted throughout centuries, by different Schools of Thought, and ongoing reinterpretation is still an option to many Muslims. Like in all holy books, one can find in the Qur'an the God of Love as well as the God of Wrath, and many historically connoted positions as well, such as the one on slavery, for example. ' Be kind to your slave ' is the Qur'anic injunction; to my knowledge, Muslims take it as a step forward in improving the condition of existence of slaves at the time of Mohamed, rather than a justification of slavery today ... Such a historical analysis can be and indeed is applied by many Muslims today to the injunctions concerning women: " Beat her lightly " is considered as a step forward from heavy punishments practised in the Middle East at the time, rather than a justification of wife beating today...

Following this line, an Algerian Muslim scholar analyses that the function of the veil was to protect married women (by contrast with slave women) in the time of Mohamed; hence its most appropriate modern equivalent is education and schooling, for this is what, in our times, gives most protection to a woman⁵. And finally, it is clear that political powers using culture and religion choose to emphasize different elements or interpretations in both culture and religion, according to circumstantial needs.

This leads us to make an essential distinction between two concepts: Islam and Muslims⁶. Islam as a religion, an ideology, a utopia, can be analysed from the point of view of theology or of philosophy. "Islam", in this sense, does not exist anywhere in the material world. The "Muslims" are those who attempt to materialize their interpretation of these ideas, i.e. on the one hand the men and women who defined themselves as religious beings, as followers of Islam, and on the other hand the political forces that monopolize the reading of the text and use it as a major strategy for accessing or keeping political power. Analyzing of their actions belongs to the

5. Soheib Bencheikh, Mariane et le Prophète: l'Islam dans la France Laïque, Grasset, Paris, 1998. (i.e. The Republic and the Prophet: Islam in Secular France.)

6. Marie-Aimée Hélie - Lucas. "The preferential symbol for islamic identity: Women in muslim personal laws." Paper presented at Wider Round Table on Identity Politics. . 8-10 October 1990, 12pp, published in Valentine Moghadem Ed, Identity Politics and Women. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1993; and in Women Living Under Muslim Laws Dossier 11/12/13, 1996, pp. 5-12.

fields of sociology and political sciences. It follows suit that not all that is done by Muslims is Islamic and that what is Islamic is even debatable and debated amongst Muslims. Islam as it should be, Muslims as they are. Muslimness is man made, not God given.

This conceptual distinction should allow one to defend human rights in Muslim countries without fear of being seen as anti Islam. It is an important distinction too, for women inside Muslim contexts who fight for their human rights. This paper exclusively focuses on the sociological and political aspects: on what people do, be it in the name of religion. Hence we are not here referring to Islam, but to Muslims.

In fact we are even talking here of 'so-called Muslims'. For, again, another important distinction needs to be made: common sense and common language takes it that all people born and raised in Muslim families are automatically Muslims believers, that all people born and raised in countries or communities in their incredible cultural and political diversity, which laws are said to be derived from the Qur'an are automatically Muslims believers. Freedom of faith is obviously denied to people born in such contexts... No one would dream of defining any honourable French man or Swiss lady 'a Christian', rather than 'a French' or 'a Swiss'. While we, Algerians, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Fijians, Canadians, or British alike, believers and non believers alike, atheists and free thinkers alike, are labelled "Muslims". Are we still talking of faith? 'Muslimness' is becoming a transnational identity - much to the delight of fundamentalists. It is becoming an unwashable 'original sin', a stamp on the skin and soul of the people whose accidental location of birth made them "Muslims". These 'extensions de sens' actually constitute an insult to true believers for whom faith is a deeply important choice in life, and to the freedom of religion. It is, as well, an insult to the personal integrity of those who have not chosen religion as a marker of their identity. Moreover, it is a very dangerous political labellisation. "Jews", believers and non believers alike, will not contradict me.

The diversity of women's struggles and strategies

Women themselves are organizing their struggles for human rights on all these fronts concomitantly. Their strategies adequately address the issue, ranging from working from within the frame of religion, by reinterpretation of the Qur'an from a feminist perspective, to an entirely secular approach of human rights⁷.

7. Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas. "Women Struggles and Strategies in the Rise of Fundamentalism in the Muslim World: From Entryism to Internationalism." In: Afshar, Haleh, Ed. *Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation*. London: MacMillan, 1993, pp.206 - 241, and in WLUML Occasional Paper No 2.: WLUML.1990, 17pp.

Interpretation of the Qur'an has long been monopolized by male scholars, and it is recently, a couple of decades ago, that a strong movement was born from the ranks of feminist theologians and women's human rights Muslim scholars⁸. Initially, it has been seen by non religious human rights advocates as hardy distinguishable from, or even colluding with, Muslim fundamentalists' forceful attempts - now unfortunately more and more successful - to infiltrate the human rights domain. The main distinction between these two very different movements is that religiously inclined women human rights advocates do not try to monopolize the field of human rights, they ally with secularists and combine approaches, even if their main focus remains to reform from within the religious framework those laws and practices that originated in obscurantist interpretations of religion. On the contrary, fundamentalists' approach excludes any other strategy and violently combat it. For them, 'outside religion, no salvation'.

Using the Trotskyist concept, I qualify this approach of "entryist", for women have invaded a field that was not theirs and have successfully initiated a dialogue on *Ijtihad* (reinterpretation) which was dormant for centuries. They propose alternative interpretations which on the one hand go back to the original text and its semiotic roots, and on the other hand develop a field of historical and cultural interpretation which is really new, for which they have widely used cross cultural analysis developed by secular feminists⁹. By so doing they have deeply modified the field of Islamic theological research.

At the other end of the spectrum, other women - be they believers or atheists -, while incorporating the pioneering work of new feminist theologians, do not see religious debate as a main strategy for social change; using their anthropologically grounded awareness of the fact that there is no such thing as a homogeneous Muslim world and far less a transnational Muslim culture, they have successfully pointed at the diversity of situations women live in Muslim countries and communities around the world. Criticizing conservative or even inhuman laws and practices, they condemn violations of women's human rights regardless of the fact that those may be justified, locally, nationally or internationally, by reference to religion. Bound neither by customs nor by religious interpretations, they state regarding reproductive rights:

" In our context, these laws, policies and practices are frequently said to flow from the imperatives of Islam. However there is considerable variation in actual laws and policies from one Muslim country/community to another. For example, across the Muslim world, policies

8. Riffat Hassan; "Selected Articles." Readers & Compilations Series: WLUMML, 1994, 47pp.

9. 'For ourselves, Women Reading the Qur'an', WLUMML, 1997.

on fertility regulation range from a total ban on contraception to forced abortion and sterilization, depending on the political interests that dominate at the moment. What is similar across the Muslim world is the use of Islam as justification of such dissimilar policies. In the present situation, when political forces and ideologies that have been labelled "fundamentalist" are on the rise, governments - even when they restrict such forces in the struggle for political power - pander to them in matters relating to women. In the process, their different political interests collude with male interests in denying women's human rights"¹⁰.

They have also pointed at all the good laws and practices that exist in different Muslim contexts that could and should be adopted in other Muslim contexts, without appearing to the tenants of cultural purity and nationalist isolationism as "importing alien mores".

Commenting on the rise of the "religious" extreme right, WLUMML wrote:

"We fear that if we do not act, we may be subjected to a situation which will not necessarily be the worst but could certainly be worse than what we have today, where for instance:

- unilateral and oral pronouncement of 'talaq' would be legal, as currently exists in India,
- women's rights to vote would be delegated to men as was the case in Algeria for two years,
- 'zina'(adultery and fornication, any extra marital sex) would be punishable by stoning to death or public flogging and/or fine, and/or imprisonment, as is currently the case in Pakistan; further, women orally divorced by their husbands (therefore having no proof of their divorce) when they marry again can be sentenced under 'zina',
- 'zina bel jabr (rape) would require the "eye witness account of four male adult Muslim men of good repute" before the rapist could be given maximum punishment , as is currently the case in Pakistan,
- women could be tried and executed for unislamic behavior, for instance laughing in the streets and/or allowing a strand of hair to fall out of the hidjab, as has happened in Iran,
- robbery would be punished by amputation of limbs, as in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, - women would be subjected to forcible contraception, abortion and sterilization, as in Bangladesh,
- women would not have the right to drive, as in Saudi Arabia,

10. WLUMML Statement to the Cairo UN World Conference on Population, in 'Women's reproductive rights in Muslim countries and communities: issues and resources', 1994)

- women would not be able to leave the country without the written permission of their fathers/husbands as in Iran and Saudi Arabia,
- women would not have the right to vote, as in Kuwait,
- women would be circumcised, as in Egypt, Somalia, Sudan,
- women would be forcibly given in marriage by their male guardians ('wali), as in communities governed by Maliki and Shafi schools, - etc...

We emphasize that none of these laws exist in all Muslim countries, nor are they intrinsic to Islam.

On the other hand, we would like all women to enjoy the following rights that exist in at least some Muslim countries:

- the right to vote at all levels, as in most Muslim countries/communities
- the right to choose their own husbands as in countries governed by the Hanafi school, - the right to divorce, as in Tunisia,
- the delegated right of divorce (talaq e tafweez) as in Pakistan and Bangladesh, - the right to a share of the marital property upon divorce, as in Malaysia,
- the right to custody and guardianship of their children after divorce, as in Tunisia,
- the right to the marital home at least till the children are adults, as in Libya - the ban on polygamy, as in Tunisia,
- the right for a wife to curtail second marriages, as in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Singapore, - etc..."¹¹

This strategy could not exist without a strong international linkage (between women from Muslim countries and communities worldwide¹², without having raised consciousness about our commonalities and diversity; it would not exist without the clear internationalist understanding that we women have 'partie liée', that the rights we gain here are bound to affect positively women elsewhere, and that the rights we lose here may affect negatively women elsewhere. This is well illustrated by the post Iranian revolution spreading of their ugly form of veiling, including to those Muslim communities which had a completely different cultural dress code and would like to retain it, and by the recent attempts to spread FGM as a "Muslim" practice to several countries in Asia where it was unheard of.

11. " Best scenario / Worst scenario ", WLUML, internal document, 1994.

12. Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas. "L'Internationalisme dans le mouvement des femmes: les réseaux internationaux de femmes." Occasional Paper No 4.: WLUML.1994, 14pp.

At a global level, the Cairo UN World Conference on Population gave a formidable example of the unholy alliance between the Vatican and El Azhar that tried to stop women's demands for reproductive rights, contraception and abortion. In this very case, it became clear that the curtailing of reproductive rights that women had recently faced in Poland or in ex-Democratic Republic of Germany were indeed part of a concerted effort towards depriving women in Muslim contexts and globally, of the same rights¹³.

This is why internationalist women strongly advocate for universal human rights. If indeed universalism, as it exists today, is generally highly criticized for its implicit ethnocentrism and leaning towards so-called western values, most women nevertheless recognize the need for, support the principle of, and work towards a new definition of universality in human rights. The massive presence of autonomous women's rights organisations from Muslim countries and communities at the UN World Conference on Women attests to the fact that women see the urgent need not only for linkages within Muslim contexts but also with the global women's movement. These groups are not to be confused with fundamentalists groups also massively present in Beijing (it would be interesting to explore their sources of funding) as well as state sponsored organisations.

What is most impressive is the integration, inter penetration, cross fertilization, and finally the reciprocal reinforcement and mutual support of these various strategies¹⁴. In most instances, far from being seen as contradictory or oppositional, they are perceived at best as complementary and at the very least as non antagonistic¹⁵.

The construction of muslimness

This vision of the world is a far cry from the one sided vision of fundamentalists for whom "Islam" is the only possible solution, and their interpretation of it the only one to be enforced, *volens nolens*, upon the world. For them, all struggles for women's human rights, be they from within the frame of religion or from a secular perspective, are equally seen as betrayal. Betrayal of one's religion: the monolithic Islam. Betrayal of one's culture: the imaginary transnational Muslim culture. And betrayal of one's community: the Umma. Women's struggles for human rights are seen as dangerously divisive of the "Muslim world".

13. Lynn Freedman, 'The Challenges of Fundamentalisms', in *Fundamentalism, women's empowerment and reproductive rights*, in *Reproductive Health Matters*, London, November 1996, and in *WLUML Dossier 19*, 1997).

14. Farida Shaheed. "Controlled or Autonomous: Identity and the Experience of the Network Women Living Under Muslim Laws." *Signs*. Vol. 19. No.4: Summer(1994).

15. on the concepts of complementarity and reciprocity in international solidarity, see: Hélie-Lucas, *WLUML*, "Heart and Soul", *WLUML internal document*, 1997, and Waterman, *WLUML Occasional Papers Series n°5*, 1994, 12pp

However, if one can expect such an analysis from fundamentalists, the collusion of well meaning liberals and human rights advocates with fundamentalists' ideology comes as a surprise. What is of most interest to me is the fact that amongst these three different but complementary strategies, only one is artificially isolated, getting most attention, most funding, most recognition. It is seen as the only authentic one, the best for "Muslims". Indeed, it is the strategy of religious interpretation. This should be of concern to all people who recognize the fascistic nature of fundamentalist movements and the fact that, in the context of globalisation, these movements are on the rise everywhere in the world today. In the name of respect for the Other's culture and religion, or for fear of being accused of racism - for those outside the Muslim contexts -, for internatization of the notion of betrayal - for those who, in one way or another, identify with Islam -, there is an undue reluctance to name and condemn violations of human rights in general and more especially of women's human rights in Muslim countries and communities.

Moreover there is reluctance to acknowledge the variety of strategies that women are using all over Muslim countries and communities, the need for this variety, their complementary and reciprocal character, and finally to admit to the legitimacy of them all. In short, while we claim our capacity to work as political equals, not only racists, but enlightened people and women's allies too, feel that we should go for the most "Muslim" possible strategy, excluding all other possibilities as alien to them.

This sends us back to the image of exoticism that is so often attached to so-called 'Muslim women'. It seems that the sense of self and identity of those tenants of the exclusive religious strategy is shattered if and when the exotic creatures come to close to one, if we feel free to use strategies that they thought were theirs and theirs only. Is The Other so different, or so much the same? What are the frightening implications of sameness for oneself....¹⁶. By selecting one strategy, limiting the choice and imposing/denying their "Muslim" identity to women who - in their own context, at a specific historical moment in time - decide for other strategies, one clearly refers to an imaginary, ahistorical, immutable image of the 'Muslim woman'. Indeed, this comforts fundamentalists' ideology and dangerous political construct of "Muslimness". Why is this construction so well received and accepted by such different sections of the political spectrum, indeed by almost everyone? The notion of difference can be manipulated from several points of view :from the point of view of racists, from the point of view of fundamentalists, from the point of view of migrants and from the point of view of liberals and human rights defenders. But ultimately, culturalist differentialism and xenophilia, despite the

16. Kenan Malik, 'The Perils of Pluralism', in 'The Future', Index on Censorship, 1997, and in WLUML Dossier 20, 1997

individualistic liberalism of its proponents exists in a vicious circle of complicity with xenophobic racism'¹⁷. For what is difference? Differences are produced by specific historical, geographical and political circumstances. However, when isolated from their context, when essentialized, referred to as a 'nature' - ahistorical and unchangeable -, under whatever disguise it presents itself, difference feeds into the ideology of racism. The promotion of difference has always been at the heart of racist agenda. It is because the Other is defined as different, radically different, ontologically different, that one ceases to even see its humanity, and finally classifies it as 'undermensch'. Racists emphasize difference: as Hitler, the apartheid regime in South Africa, the segregationists from the US South elaborated on difference... Right now, the extreme Right in Europe has taken up the flag of difference, using it to argue against the possibility of 'Muslims' becoming citizens. "Equal but different".... It is not the place to debate here on the dialectical relationship of nature and culture. But, not surprisingly, in times when extreme right political forces are on the rise, there is an upsurge of 'nature' and biology, including in feminist theory and in science (recent emphasis on the genetic origin of homosexuality, for instance), and the cult of difference, rather than integration. "Communalisation" (to use the South Asian concept) of the communities, rather than promoting the "melting pot"(indeed so often a failure and a disillusion in practice) becomes the buzz word of human rights advocates. I presume that these thoughts cannot be distorted to the point that they would be equated to advocating for the eradication of cultural differences and their homogenisation through the adoption of the Western model. I am only pointing at some of the consequences that the present political construction of a 'natural' Otherness, especially for so-called Muslims, have for women and for their human rights.

"Difference" presently benefits from a conjunction of interests which gave it a dangerous prominence. Failure to achieve equality leads to exaltation and fantacisation of difference: politics of nostalgia of migrants bound together by being confronted to the same racism. For racists, social differences are seen as the inevitable product of natural differences and thus justify exclusion. Social scientists, 'experts' and politologists elaborate on 'common sense'¹⁸ understanding of difference and give academic credentials to 'immediate knowledge'¹⁹. Hand in hand with racists and extreme right political parties, exploiting the inadequacy of social scientists methodologies and the naivety of liberals, fundamentalists exploit the momentum to further their agenda. Within the prevalent discourse of multiculturalism and multiethnicism in Europe and North America, Muslims

17. Aziz El Azmeh, op.cit

18. Bourdieu & al, *Le Métier de Sociologue*, Paris, Mouton, 1968

19. Bourdieu, idem

are seen as sharing of a religion which has been dubbed a culture. Despite the fact that "Muslims" live all over the planet, therefore in very different cultural set ups, despite within one specific country, differences between those of rural and urban origin, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, religion is seen as overdetermining their socio economic and ideological positions. Culturalist islamism assumes a cohesive homogeneity which is by no means a reflection of the stunning diversity of social reality. Its fantasmatic "culture" seems impenetrable to others' culture, to historical developments, unchangeable overtime, - dead rather than reflecting the living history of living people.

Liberals and human rights advocates follow this ideological line. In the name of respect of the Other, respect of the Other's Culture, they promote cultural relativism. They want to redefine equality so that it fits difference. In the name of difference, they justify practices that, for themselves, would be considered barbaric. And they are not even yet sure, when concerned people, concerned women, challenge this imaginary culture, that they are not witnessing cultural treason and should not, hand in hand with fundamentalists, strongly object to it.

My favorite example has long been the Dutch Parliament's debate on the opportunity to allow, on the soil of the Netherlands, the practice of FGM "for the concerned sections of the population". However a very good example has recently been offered by a study on North African migrants in Belgium that led to propositions of law which, if adopted, – despite the fact that 100% of the women investigated unanimously protested her conclusions – a protest acknowledged by the author and researcher -, would legally establish discrimination and inequality, on the one hand between men and women migrants, and on the other hand between them and the rest of the population in Belgium as well. The proposed legal measures will abolish - for these migrants and for them only - the rule of equality that is the basis of the Constitution, by adopting amendments inspired by some of the gender discriminatory laws or customs of their country of origin²⁰.

One cannot help suggesting a few epistemological questions: who defines culture? Are women entitled to do so? Is citizenship restricted to men, elders, "representatives of the community" and vocal fundamentalists? Is culture immutable and in that case in which century are we deciding – in place of the concerned people - that it stopped evolving? Although the habit of secluding and isolating "savages" and "primitives" for the sake of preserving their authentic Otherness has officially lost its credential, it seems that new forms of non material reservations have come to get legitimacy.

20. Foblets, Marie-Claire, Ed. 'Femmes marocaines et conflits familiaux en immigration: quelles solutions juridiques appropriées?'. Antwerpen: Maklu.1998, 473pp.

Are human rights today so totally depoliticized ?

I am not here using this term as in 'politician politics', but in the sense that ancient Greek philosophers gave it: a reflection which was also the duty of all citizens.

All opinions, all practices are not equally valid and respectable. Fundamentalism and fascism are not just another opinion. It is not "tolerable", since tolerance nowadays seems to be seen as a cardinal virtue and the epitome of human rights, that Nazis physically eliminated "unfits", communists, gypsies, homosexuals and Jews, that Hindu fundamentalists sell audiocassettes by the millions calling for the murder of Muslims, that Afghani "Taliban" install gender apartheid, that Algerian fundamentalists cut the throats, the breasts, the genitals of women and invoke Islam to rape them, impregnate them and force them to bear and produce " good Muslims ", just as the Serbs impregnated Bosnian women to force them to bare and produce the superior race ?

For all these crimes are not accidental casualties of war, they are the logical consequences of ideologies which clearly, in the name of purity of the race or of the holy creed, intend to commit these crimes and justify even the intention of committing them, - as the Fatwas on Salman Rushdie and others, known and unknown citizens, amply prove²¹.

These opinions and ideologies are not just another view of life. Should they be voiced, and relayed by Human Rights organisations, in the name of freedom of speech, freedom of opinion ? We have numerous examples, since the fundamentalist war against civilians started in Algeria²², of well established Human Rights organisations giving a platform to fundamentalists, as if their crimes did not disqualify them from benefitting from such alliances. Human Rights organisations see them as victims of repression by States, which is the case, at points, when States are not negotiating with them the sharing of political power; but they ignore their main role as perpetrators and the magnitude of their crimes²³. Moreover human rights organisations ignore the fact that fundamentalists' ideology plans and justifies all these crimes, for they are only applying their - religious ? - principles when stoning to death the adulterers and assassinating the unbelievers. The wonderful principle of freedom of speech was not meant to help propagate hatred, calls to murder and views which are definitely against human rights. A frightful confusion between ends and formal means leads to encourage and support, in the name of freedom of thought, freedom of speech and

21. *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Ed. Fatwas against women in Bangladesh: WLUML, 1996, 148pp

22. WLUML, forthcoming, 'Algeria, A War Against Civilians'

23. Helie-Lucas, Marieme. "Fundamentalism and Femicide." In Indai Lourdes Sajor, Ed. *Common Grounds: Violence Against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations*. Quezon City: Asian Center for Women's Human Rights, 1998, pp.108-121

democracy, the free expression and subsequent access to political power of the new Hitlers of our time.

At the end of a century that sees the re-emergence of old religions and new sects, as well as spirituality, in societies that have lost faith in transformation towards social justice, deceived and hopeless people turn to gods and values that many of us thought dead.

At the end of a century that sees economic and political globalisation threaten the very lives of people, one witnesses an unforeseen outcome of globalisation: atomized, interchangeable individuals fearing for their lives, instinctively regroup with their kin in order to support each other.

A North African saying summarizes this reaction to precarity: "Me against my brother. Me and my brothers against my cousin. Me, my brothers and my cousins against my tribe. Me, my brothers, my cousins, my tribe against the other tribe in the next village...". The other side of globalisation is the fragmentation of the people. Along the lines of religion, ethnicity or culture.

This is the situation fundamentalisms build on and exploit. But is it not what all fascisms also build on ? Human rights, with their counter goal of universalism, have to identify fundamentalisms as the greatest threat of the time.

The Politics of Theorizing 'Islamic Feminism': Implications for International Feminist Movements¹

Shahrzad Mojab

While the increasing internationalization of feminism provides new prospects for women's solidarity throughout the world, theoretical perspectives such as identity politics, cultural relativism and postmodernism emphasize the uniqueness, particularism, and localism of each and every feminist movement. This paper argues that these theoretical positions (1) set up great divides among women of the world according to their religion, ethnicity, nationality, culture, geographic location, and other particularisms, (2) ignore the heterogeneity within each feminist movement, and (3) endorse incapacitating strategies for women with different cultural and religious backgrounds. My critique focuses on the ways these theories construct entities such as "Muslim woman" and "Islamic feminism" and put them in opposition to Western feminisms.

The East-West Divide

Rudyard Kipling's (1865-1936) well-known claim, "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," has re-surfaced in subtle and astonishingly appealing theorizations in the late twentieth century. Today, hosts of theoretical positions, such as cultural relativism, identity politics, and postmodernism, emphasize the uniqueness or particularism of individuals, cultures, nations, and their experiences and identities. Human beings and their cultures are, according to theorists of particularism, best identified in terms of their "differences" from each other. Ideas of sameness, solidarity and internationalism are, consequently, rejected as "grand narratives," "universalization," "totalization," or "essentialization." Politically, these theories advocate either defeatism and passivism or the fragmentation of women's movements into local or "micro" initiatives.²

These theoretical positions — postmodernism, cultural relativism or identity politics — can be distinguished in terms of their histories, claims

1. This paper is based, in part, on my article, "'Muslim' women and 'Western' feminists: The debate on particulars and universals," published in *Monthly Review*, Vol 50, No. 7, December 1998, pp. 19-30.

2. For a brief survey of "post-modern political orientations," see Rosenau (1992:138-66).

and politics. Each perspective consists of a body of claims that differ in emphasizing the particularity of women or questioning feminist solidarity on national or international levels.³ For the purposes of this paper, however, I treat them as a theoretical bloc insofar as they emphasize the particularity of each feminist movement, and arrive at similar conclusions about feminism in general and women in Islamic countries in particular.⁴

Kipling's "East is East and West is West" can rather conveniently be associated with what an *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1987, p. 883) biographer calls "his celebration of British imperialism" and his "genuine sense of a civilizing mission that required every Englishman, or, more broadly, every white man, to bring European culture to the heathen natives of the uncivilized world." By contrast, current theories of particularism revolt against projects of cultural imperialism or ideas of national and racial supremacy. Ironically, however, they confront Eurocentrism by entreating a universe of non-Western ethnocentrisms. In these formulations, women's emancipation is treated as a "grand narrative," which can be rescued only if women are segregated into ethnic, national or religious microcosms. In the following section, I engage in a critique of new theorists of particularism by focusing on the way they construct Iranian women into a unique entity defined by their religious, Islamic, affiliations.

The East is not the East

Feminists in the West generally condemn the religious misogyny of theocratic states such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Since the assumption of power by the Islamic regime in 1979, the women of Iran have been at the centre of Western debates about Muslim women.⁵ For

3. One may refer, for instance, to two major trends within postmodernist theory, often identified as conformist and critical or sceptical and affirmative (see, e.g., Rosenau 1992).

4. The conflict between universalism and particularism, sometimes confused with essentialism and anti-essentialism, is being debated in diverse disciplinary domains ranging from philosophy to law to sociology and feminist studies. According to Fraser and Nicholson (1990:34), postmodern-feminist theory should be "nonuniversalist." Salecl (1993:89) is already convinced that in "today's 'postmodern' world,... universality has been abandoned in all areas of social life," except in the realm of human rights. There is, however, an extensive body of literature which rejects particularist approaches to human rights. Donoho (1991) provides a general survey of the debate. Donnelly (1989) argues in favor of universalism while Renteln (1990) advocates a relativist position on rights. While Marxists theorize the dialectics of the universal and particular, most postmodernists advocate a total elimination of the universal. For theoretical and philosophical debates on the topic, see, for instance, Stoljar (1995), and Wit (1995). For a critique of particularist views such as postmodernism and identity politics, which deny a common struggle against patriarchy and capitalism, see Ebert (1996).

5. Although Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates are more misogynist than the Islamic Republic of Iran, the media and academia in the West generally ignore them. One plausible explanation is their pro-Western, especially pro-American, policy.

political reasons, Western media and politicians capitalize on the Islamic state's forced gender apartheid — compulsory veiling, sexual segregation in public spaces, barring women from access to the legal profession, etc. While politicians and the mainstream media are interested in gaining political ground, feminists and activists in women's movements support Iranian women in a spirit of solidarity and commitment to the liberation of all women.

Since the mid-1980s, however, some feminists have advanced a new political approach to the state of women living in Islamic totalitarian states. They make a number of claims about the women of Iran: (1) Iranian women constitute a special category constructed by their religion, Islam; (2) their demands have to be confined within the boundaries set up by religious tradition and the legal, theological, and political frameworks established by the Islamic Republic of Iran; (3) the theocratic state and its official religion, Islam, are open and flexible, allowing women a space to engage in negotiating their rights; (4) a new type of "Islamic woman" and "Islamic feminism" has emerged, a situation which has far reaching implications for the transformation of gender relations. For instance, summing up the experience of fifteen years of women's life under the Islamic state, Tohidi posits the formation of an "Islamic model of womanhood." She suggests that (Tohidi, 1994, pp. 141-142):

'the model of Islamic woman' in Iran has taken on new characteristics which are distinct from, and in some respects contradictory to, the image of a domesticated woman promoted by the Islamic clerics in the initial stages of the Revolution. Among (Elite and non-Elite) Muslim women active in the socio-political arena, a new consciousness or a reformist trend, which some have called 'Islamic feminism', is quietly evolving. This trend opens up new prospects for Iranian women in general and new challenges for secular feminists in particular. It may change the dimensions, conception, and definition of women's identity and the woman question for the younger generation of Iranian women and men.

The "Muslim woman" and Islamic feminism are viewed here as agents of historical change destined to liberate women and challenge secular feminism. Another researcher, in her study of the activism of the non-government "Women's Society of the Islamic Revolution of Iran," concludes that the "Islamic-reformist" orientation of this group is the only "alternative weapon for the survival of the efforts to improve women's lives in future Iran" (Nakanishi, 1994, p. 206).⁶

6. According to this study, WSIR and its journal *Payam-e Hajer* (Message of Hajer) employ a "quite effective strategy: to make a protest to the government, the organization disguises itself as a proponent of Islamist ideology on women, while actually criticizing the government" (Nakanishi, 1994, p. 201). This is a "middle of the road approach," advocating neither Western feminism nor a "rigid interpretation of the Qura'n" (*Ibid*, p. xii). The organization does not "seek rights equal to men (in the Western sense)" (p. 205).

Underlying these propositions is a relativist thinking which shows respect for diverse cultures and traditions. Muslim women are seen as active and intelligent human beings who are conscious about their position and status. This is no doubt a departure from colonialist, racist stigmatizations of non-Western societies and, especially, the rejection of Islam as a religion inferior to Christianity. Theoretically speaking, however, this "pluralist" position is based on a simplistic and reductionist view of women's "experience" or "identity" in Islamic countries. It rejects the plurality of Iranian women's lives and, inadvertently, promotes the hegemony of a minority over the majority. Politically, it often overlooks the relations of oppression in Islamic states, institutes a great divide among women of the world, and discriminates against secular and non-Muslim women. I will elaborate these points by focusing on the question of veiling.

The Politics of Covering Women's Body

Particularists authenticate Islamic codes on the regulation of gender relations by, among other things, de-Islamizing them, and tying them into the "lived experience" of Muslim women. When the Islamic regime came to power in Iran, women immediately turned into a prominent tool and target of Islamization of Iranian social and political order. Gradually, women were denied the right to choose their modes of dressing. Using coercive means, the state imposed the covering of all parts of the body except the face and hands, banned the use of buttons, bright colours, make up and fashion. In spite of harsh punishments such as flogging and imprisonment, resistance against imposed dressing was widespread (Paidar, 1997, pp. 337-44). The policing of women's body has, consequently, been a prominent site of debate about women's rights. Drawing on her own experience as a "non-veiled Muslim woman of Iranian descent," Hoodfar (1994a, p. 5) succinctly presents the relativist or particularist position:

the veil, which since the nineteenth century has symbolized for the West the inferiority of Muslim cultures, remains a powerful symbol both for the West and for Muslim societies. However, while for the Westerners its meaning has been static and unchanging, in Muslim cultures the veil's functions and social significance have varied tremendously, particularly during times of rapid social change. Veiling is a lived experience full of contradictions and multiple meanings. While it has clearly been a mechanism in the service of patriarchy, a means of regulating and controlling women's lives, women have used the same social institution to free themselves from the bonds of patriarchy. Muslim women like all other women are social actors, employing, reforming, and changing existing social institutions, often creatively, to their own ends. The static colonial image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman thus often contrasts sharply with women's lived experience of veiling. To deny this is also to deny Muslim women their agency.

While a colonialist or "Orientalist" bias is certainly present in some Western constructions of the meaning of the veil, the cultural relativist versions suffer from equally problematic ideological commitments.⁷ In her own account, for instance, Hoodfar ignores the polysemic nature of the veil, its changing meanings and the contexts of "rapid social change." The "lived experience" of Muslim women is romanticized while the life of secular, non-veiling Muslim women and non-Muslim women is not treated as a relevant experience.

Epistemologically, experience is conceptualized as something pure, genuine, unmeditated, legitimate, and untainted by ideology and politics. "As if somehow experience magically speaks for itself. As if experiences are self-observances, are auto-didactic, something that gives us an accurate notion of the world" (McLaren, 1995, p. 253). The "lived experience" of veiling in Iran is, however, a highly contested territory in which the Iranian state, in both its secular and theocratic forms, has coercively intervened in gender relations for the purposes of nation-building and state-building. Particularists who celebrate the multiple meanings of the veil often ignore that the family, religion, cultural traditions and the state use combined forms of violence in order to cover women's body according to the codes of Islamic patriarchy. The inscription of veiling in the "lived experience" is based on a number of myths.

One of the myths about veiling is the claim that it is worn by the majority of Muslim women. It is often ignored, both in the West and in Iran, that most women, Muslims and non-Muslims, have never put the Islamic veil on their heads and bodies. Women, both veiled and non-veiled, had lived side by side for centuries, and the clergy either failed or did not care to persuade everyone to follow the rules. The covering of women's body became thoroughly politicized when the first Pahlavi monarch, Reza Shah (1925-41), used coercion in order to unveil women in 1936. Contrary to widespread claims, the majority of women (in Kurdistan, Guilan, Mazandaran, among tribal peoples such as the Bakhtiaris, Lurs, and Qashqais, and religious or ethnic minorities such as the Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews) did not veil when the government launched its forced unveiling project. Confidential documents of the Pahlavi state related to the unveiling campaign of the 1930s, recently published by the Islamic government, reveal that women in rural and tribal areas did not need to be unveiled because they never used the cover (Iran National Archives 1992). The reports from officials who were in charge of implementing the policy in the provinces indicate that veiling was primarily an urban phenomenon. According to one report dated August 20, 1936 from Tikan Tapeh, Azerbaijan to the Ministry of Interior, "the people live tribally non-veiled, and *hijab* (head cover) and *chador* (full body cover) are restricted to the

7. For a similar view see also Shirazi-Mahajan (1995, pp. 35-51).

families of the notables and important merchants... But women of peasants and farmers as in the past work and toil without hijab..." (pp. 47, 48). Another report dated January 29, 1936 from Bavandpour, Kermanshah, to the Ministry of Interior noted: "As you are aware, the women of tribes who form the population of this region have not been veiled and now that other women [of Iran] are welcoming this regeneration [unveiling], they are happy, too" (p. 240). According to a letter dated January 30, 1936 sent from officials in Gorgan to the governor of Gonbad-e Qabous, "the tribes, villages and small towns in Iran never had the veil" (p. 274). It must be noted that 79 per cent of the total population was rural in 1934 (Ehlers, 1991, p. 624). It is not difficult, then, to argue that an essential Muslim woman enchanted by the veil is largely a construction of relativists and Islamic ideologists. They universalize the particular case of the imposition of the veil on a minority of urban women into the "lived experience" of all "Muslim women." The cover, even if it can be traced back to Islam, entails different meanings for Muslim women who are very heterogenous in terms of the politics of dressing female body.

The last Pahlavi monarch adopted a more relaxed policy about (un)covering women's bodies. When the Islamic regime came to power in 1979, the majority of Iranian women were, as in the past, non-veiled. Like Reza Shah who forcibly removed the veil, the Islamic state uses extreme forms of coercion in order to impose it on even non-Muslims. Disciplining women's body through dress codes has been a priority of the state in and outside Iran. If Reza Shah could unveil urban women only, the Islamic regime has tried to impose the veil on both urban and rural women. Using diplomatic power, the state promotes the veil globally, from the Olympic games to the UNESCO. If the use of hejab signified anti-state action for some Muslim women in 1979 Iran, its rejection today means resistance against theocratic despotism. Imposed through state violence, the veil has turned into a means of repression rather than liberation.

The veil in post-Revolutionary Iran is not a site of struggle against patriarchy. If in Turkey or Algeria it is one means of resistance against secular and rule, in Iran the reverse is the case. The Islamic state has developed a machinery of repression, which distinguishes various levels of violation of the official codes of covering the body, e.g. *bi-hejabi* (non-veiling), *nim-hejabi* (half-veiling), and *bad-hejabi* (improper veiling). While each form of resistance invites a certain level of punishment — physical, financial, social and psychological — this language has been the target of popular ridicule and joking. In fact, resistance against the hijab involves more than a spontaneous reaction against a theocratic state's use of force. Women defy the state by violating all the official dress codes including a ban on bright colors, the proscription of the use of buttons, and the official shape of the veil.

The second myth is the claim that resistance against the veil is not “authentic.” It is the “corruption” of the authentic Islamic culture by the West. It is no secret, however, that opposition to the body cover is rooted in more than a century of democratic revolutionary movements in Iran. In mid-nineteenth-century, the Babi movement called for the reform of religion and the harsh treatment of women. One of the leaders was a female poet, Tahereh Qurrat al-Ain who lived in 1814-1854 (see, among others, Amanat 1989:295-331). Although the movement was brutally suppressed, it continued to influence many intellectuals who “wrote against women’s subjugation in family and society and condemned the practice of veiling” (Afary 1992, p. 104). Women participated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, which aimed at the establishment of a democratic and independent political system. Some of the targets of women’s liberation movement of the early twentieth century were veiling, polygyny and restrictions against their right to education (*Ibid*). By the early 1920s, the Iranian poet Mirzad-e-ye ‘Eshqi’ (1894-1924), in one of his best known poems, the *Black Shroud* (*kafan-e siyah*), denounced the *chador*.⁸ Thus, the intellectual and political struggle of women and men against the veil predates the project of forced unveiling in the 1930s.

The third myth is the unanimity of the Islamic leadership on the strict imposition of veiling and sexual apartheid. The religious hierarchy has, however, been divided over the scope of policing women’s body cover. For instance, the Iran Liberation Movement, whose late leader, Mehdi Bazargan, became the first prime minister of the Islamic Republic, advocates a much more relaxed regulation of gender relations. In fact, faced with persistent resistance against the veil, some of the factions sharing power in the government do not support the strict implementation of segregation policies.

The fourth myth is the construction of Iran as a “Muslim society.” Why should any social formation be reduced to its religion and defined by it? Moreover, contrary to the dominant image, Iran is a religiously heterogeneous society. Even the dominant religion, Islam, is not homogenous. Most of the Kurds (8.8% of the total population of the country), the Baluch people (2.9%), the Turkmans (1.2%), and some populations along the Persian Gulf are Sunni Muslims of different denominations. Even the official brand of Islam, Twelver Imam Shi’ism, is not unified, as we can readily see from the suppression of the clergymen who are labelled as believers in “liberal” or “American” Islam. Moreover, there are minorities such as Baha’is, Isma’ilis, and Ahl-e Haqq who distinguish themselves from the Muslims and whose religions are not

8. *Kafan*, or the shroud in which a dead body is buried, must, according to Islamic tradition, be white; the *chador*, i.e., full body cover for women is usually black.

recognized by the state. There are also sizeable Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish minorities, all with their own seats in the Islamic parliament.

The fifth myth is the construction of a static, unidimensional “Muslim woman,” whose consciousness or identity is shaped by one factor only — religion. An Iranian woman’s identity is, however, a changing mix of social class (based on sharp socio-economic cleavages), nationality (Baluch, Kurd, Persian, Turk, etc.), ethnicity (Armenian, Assyrian, Jew, etc.), religion (Baha’i, Christianity, Islam, etc.), language (Arabic, Baluchi, Kurdish, Persian, Turkish, etc.), urban/rural background, education (in a half-literate society), political affiliation or non-affiliation, and other social and cultural cleavages.

Based on a-historical and reductionist claims detailed above, particularist positions deny the diversity —social, cultural, linguistic, political, religious — of Iranian women in order to universalize them into a population whose identity is determined by an imaginary uniform religion, and whose resistance against patriarchy should inevitably conform to the dictates of Islam. This position is consistent with the policy and practice of the Islamic state, and shares the Orientalist world view, which depicts the world’s Muslims as fanatic followers of their religion. The very concept “Muslim woman” is questionable insofar as it involves the construction of a diverse population into a universal entity (the Muslim woman), which is then reassembled into a particularism to be separated from the non-Muslim women of the world. The concept “Muslim society” is equally untenable (see Zubaida 1995, who questions the conceptualization of “an essential Muslim society”).

The positing of an Islamic feminist consciousness or a “lived experience” determined by Islam is, thus, questionable. How can this experience be unaffected by competing ideological, political, legal, and religious positions that have torn the country apart? In Iran, more than many other contexts, the every-day experience of veiling and dressing is a conscious political act, involving reflection, interpretation and the calculation of the often dangerous outcomes of violating a dress code. Such experiences occur in a society where the regulation of gender relations is enshrined in the constitution, and the repressive and persuasive organs of the state implement the policy on a daily basis. In Iran today, state power lies behind every woman’s attire, whether voluntarily or coercively veiled.

For many feminists critical of the Islamic project, the question is not, contrary to Hoodfar, “to deny Muslim women their agency.” The debate is, rather, over agency itself. By “agency,” I mean consciousness, especially feminist knowledge, politics and organization. The post-1979 Islamic feminist “agency” in Iran is not the outcome of a free exchange of ideas in an open space where all women, Muslim and non-Muslim, secular and religious, can participate. It has, rather, evolved in the wake of violent repression of the secular women’s movement, and the forced Islamization

of gender relations. The opening of a limited space for secular women who do not or cannot challenge the legitimacy of the Islamic state is, thus, the outcome of the closure of all the spaces opened up by the revolutionary outbreak of 1978-79. The state has taken an active role in creating an "ideal" Muslim woman identity, which is being propagated through the strictly controlled educational system, the media and the mosque networks (on the "regime's ideological imposition of an 'ideal' woman," see, among others, Nakanishi 1994, pp. 51-86). Although there is room for pro-regime Muslim women to engage in debate, the state has set the agenda and its discursive frameworks. To put it bluntly, the Muslim women's "agency" acknowledged by particularists is the agency of a minority of women activists. While it is part of the diverse political spectrum of Iranian society, there is no ground for universalising it as the agency of all Iranian women. Moreover, this is an agency that has achieved state power. Far from being denied, it is scripted into the constitution of the "Absolute Rule of the Jurisprudent" (*velayat-e faqih-e motlaqqeh*), a form of state imposed on Iranians through the most violent repressions recorded in the country. Under the conditions, it is the agency of the non-veiled women that is denied, and needs to be confirmed.

Cultural relativists including, ironically, many anthropologists deny the authenticity of the culture of non-veiling practised by the majority of Iranian women, the culture of anti-veiling, and ignore the demands of non-Muslim Iranians. A century of Iranian women's movements, mostly secular, both liberal and socialist, is not treated as part of Iranian culture.

In recent years, many particularists have been fascinated by the use of veil as a means of resistance (MacLeod, 1992, pp. 533-558). However, these observers are not able to demonstrate how the veil can be used to oppose let alone subvert patriarchy. In countries such as Egypt and Turkey, some Muslim women use the veil for opposing secular and dictatorial states. The body cover remains, at the same time, a major tool of sexual segregation. Feminists can indeed respect any woman's voluntary choice of veiling, without romanticizing it as a means of liberation.

The West is not the West

While particularists can readily universalize the highly diverse population of Iranian women into an Islamic particularism, they refuse to see in the universe of patriarchy the universality of oppression. It is not uncommon to hear, for instance from a feminist anthropologist, that "most Iranian women (rightly or wrongly) are probably in agreement with an ideology that stresses complementarity of male and female roles and partial separation of male and female spheres of activity" (Higgins, 1987, p. 608). In other words, Iranian women endorse the official policy of sexual apartheid because they believe in Islamic rulings about the "complementarity" and "separation" of male and female roles. Consistent

with this position, particularists do not discern universal trends in women's resistance against patriarchy.

If patriarchal systems of power do not share common features, the resistance against them should necessarily be confined within the particularism of each culture and religion. Advocating a cultural relativist position, Higgins, for instance, rejected the views of Kate Millett, an "international feminist" who was "convinced of the contemporary universality of patriarchy and of the need for a women's movement that ignores national boundaries" (Higgins 1982). Millett was criticized for treating "equal education; equal pay; equal opportunity; access to abortion, contraception, and sex education; and childcare facilities... as the universal minimal accoutrements of sexual equality." She complained that Millett was proposing a "model for sexual equality," which was Western and could not apply to Iran or other non-Western cultures. Addressing the question Millett had raised in her book, "How can we help [the women of Iran]?", Higgins answered: "Perhaps we cannot."⁹ The separation of the East and the West seems to be final.

Contrary to Higgins, however, the demands that she particularizes as Western have been on the agenda of Iranian women throughout the twentieth century. It is indeed difficult to imagine how working women, often ruthlessly exploited, in Iran or in any other society would not demand equal pay, equal opportunity or childcare facilities. Even if "childcare facilities" emerged in the West, how its adoption (its practice, or even the need or demand for it) in the megacities of Tehran, Cairo or Istanbul would still be branded as foreign (Western)? In fact, since Higgins declared contraception as a Western feminist demand, the Islamic state itself has actively promoted it.¹⁰ Punishments are in place for couples who aspire to form large families (Paidar, 1997, pp. 286-89). Ayatollah Khomeini who had strongly rejected women's suffrage rights as Western corruption, decided to endorse it when he assumed power.

The separation of Muslim and Western women is achieved, inevitably, through the construction of a universal West with its unique women and feminisms. Since religious values are seen as determining in the identity formation of believers in Islam, conflict between Muslim women and the rest of the world is deemed inevitable. The West is the "Other" of the Muslim East. The result is a global segregation of women on the basis of religion. Under the conditions, there is little room for a critique of the Islamic regulation of gender relations. All Western critics of the veil can be readily dismissed as negotiators of "racism" and "colonialism." The West,

9. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

10. See, for instance, Homa Hoodfar 1994b.

like the Muslim woman, is constructed into a monolithic world. According to Hoodfar (1994a, p.16),

[T]he assumption that veiling is a static practice which symbolizes the oppressive nature of patriarchy in Muslim societies has prevented social scientists and western feminists from examining Muslim women's own accounts of their lives, hence perpetuating the racist stereotypes which are ultimately in the service of patriarchy in both societies. On the one hand, these mostly man-made images of the oriental Muslim women are used to tame women's demand for equality in the Western world by reminding them how much they are better off than their Muslim counterparts. On the other hand, these oriental and negative stereotypes are mechanisms by which western dominant culture re-creates and perpetuates beliefs about their superiority and dominance. Western feminists, by buying into a racist construction of the veil, and taking part in daily racist incidents force Muslim women to choose between fighting racism or fighting sexism. The question is why should we be forced to choose?

Here, Western feminists are made responsible for pushing Muslim women into abandoning their struggle against sexism. Several objections to this claim are in order. First, the West is as diverse as any other society; it is not appropriate to universalise Western critics as pro-colonialist and pro-racist. Such a discourse, widely diffused by the Islamic state, is not shared by many Iranian women and men who are inspired by Western peoples' struggle for freedom, democracy, and socialism. In North America, for instance, the struggle against racism is much more advanced compared with any Islamic country.¹¹

Second, Western feminist criticism of the veil and the sexual apartheid policies of the Islamic regime cannot be equated with the positions of Western states and mainstream media. Many feminists are inspired by a deep commitment to the democratization of life, particularly a radical transformation of unequal gender relations. Contrary to particularist claims, it is appropriate to critique the veil even if many Muslim women voluntarily

11. In the West, a rich and growing body of anti-racist theory and practice has developed over the decades largely as a result of the struggle of Black and Native peoples, immigrants, ethnic groups, as well as Whites. However, in multinational and multilingual Iranian society where Persian language and culture are official and dominant, non-Persian peoples such as the Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Jews are subject to harsh racism in both the state sphere and civil society (to the extent that it exists). In a country where only half the people are native speakers of the Persian language, non-Persian peoples are constitutionally denied the right to education in their native languages. The Islamic state has refused to implement Article 15 of its constitution which allows the teaching of the literature of "ethnic and local languages." Racism of the anti-Semitic type, for example, is rampant in modern Persian literature (see Pirnazar 1995 for a brief survey). My own experience indicates the existence, among Iranian immigrants in North America, of extensive racist attitudes towards Black and Aboriginal peoples. Many Iranians deny the existence of racism within Iranian society.

use it. There is nothing sacred about veiling, Islamic or non-Islamic. Indeed, feminists in the West have not outdone Iranian women and men who have denounced the *hijab* and *chador* throughout the twentieth century.

Third, to claim that Muslim women are forced to choose between racism and sexism is a serious underestimation of their intellectual and mental abilities to distinguish between racism/colonialism and feminism. Indeed, the choose-between-the-two claim has been a major propaganda line of the Islamic state, which equates Western peoples with their governments, and denounces the entire non-Muslim world as either communist or imperialist. This xenophobic policy is highlighted in the slogan, "Neither the East nor the West, the Islamic Republic." Women in Islamic countries do not have to choose between racism and sexism. Relying on Iranian women's experience as well as the rich theory and practice of the world feminist movement, they can resist the racism of Western states and the media as well as the racism and xenophobia promoted by their own Islamic leadership. "Muslim women" can easily discern, for example, the united platform of the Islamic Republic and Vatican against women's rights (see Bronski 1994, on the Vatican, Iran and Beijing Conference). The globalization of life calls for alliances on all sides. While veiling must be respected as the right of any woman who voluntarily chooses it, any attempt to intimidate its critics into silence by accusing them with racism is inappropriate.

And the Twain Always Meet

Some particularists point to the political advantages of a feminist movement that confines itself to the agenda of the Islamic state, and avoids the "Western model of gender relations." According to Hoodfar (1994a, p.17), for example, "[T]he advantage of the new Islamist feminists over more secularized 'Western' activists is that they challenge and reform the Islamic doctrine from within rather than advocating a Western model of gender relations." The emphasis here is on an agency that develops on the basis of Muslim women's own practice within the limitations set by the Islamic state or the religious world view. I argue that, as conscious human beings, women are capable of transcending the limitations of their religion, nationality, culture, and the space and time in which they live. This has been done in part by learning from the experience of women in other parts of the world, especially in the West. Feminist theory has been an inspiration in this struggle. The internationalization of women's movement has, in turn, enriched feminist theory and practice in the West. Today, feminists in Asia, Africa and Latin America contribute to the global struggle against capitalist and pre-capitalist forms of patriarchy.

The feminist movement is global in the sense that women in almost every country of the world are engaged in various struggles to change their lives. This trend of globalization began in the latter part of the nineteenth

century with the rise of feminist consciousness in Asian and African countries, both as a result of internal dynamics of these societies and learning from the the feminist movements of the West. Events like March 8th, the International Women's Day or decennial conferences held by the United Nations are aspects of internationalization. Today, many states take at least symbolic action in order to show interest in improving the status of women. The formation of global systems of communication, ranging from satellite television to the Internet, have further contributed to the globalization of the movement. No doubt, while the potential for solidarity is great, the practice is limited. There is, for example, no feminist organization comparable to the environmentalist Greenpeace.

Taking the Iranian feminist movement as an example, it has experienced considerable expansion beyond its territorial borders. The coming to power of the Islamic regime led to the suppression of the secular feminist movement, which consisted of a diverse spectrum ranging from liberalism to socialism. As a result, a large number of political activists, both male and female, had to leave the country. Today, the emigré feminists are organized in at least a dozen women's organizations and produce no less than a dozen magazines and web sites. Many immigrant Iranian female academics teach and engage in feminist research in universities in the West. Many of these feminists are eager to contribute to the struggle of women in Iran. In recent years, these feminists are sharply divided in terms of their strategies. One group continues to reject the possibility of a radical change of the Islamic regime's regulation of gender relations. Although the activists in this group are quite diverse in their perspectives, they reject the religious, political and ideological bases of the Islamic state's policies. Other feminists inspired by particularist or relativist perspectives believe that Islamic feminists who work within the system are capable of reforming the regime and eventually dethroning patriarchy.

The case of Iranian feminist movement provides a complex interaction of the universal and particular, the local and global, the national and international, theory and practice, and agency and structure. Although postmodernists have already announced the collapse of these bipolar, dichotomous oppositions, they continue to occupy much of the discourse and practice of all sides involved.

In their denunciations of universalism, particularists eliminate or, rather, deny one side of the opposition, the universal, and celebrate the other side, i.e., the particular. I have tried to demonstrate, however, that in practice their particularisations have necessarily required extensive universalization. By contrast, a dialectical approach recognizes the individuality and particularity of each woman and every feminist movement. However, dialectics posits a relationship of unity and conflict between particular feminist strategies. Viewed this way, while Muslim women's voluntary choice of the veil is respected and forcible unveiling is rejected, it

challenges the institution of veiling and resists the segregation of human beings along sex lines.

To give another example of dialectical approach, let us look at Mayer's analysis of the "Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam," issued in 1990 by the Organization of Islamic States. The declaration announced that all rights were subject to Islamic law, and made no provisions for granting women equal rights with men (Mayer 1994). Examining this document, Mayer notes that "particularisms" such as Islamic claims about gender relations "are nothing more than disguises for the universality of male determination to cling to power and privilege." Islamic particularism entreats "the universal claim for the subordinate status of women" (Mayer 1995:185).

Particularist approaches also ignore the unity and conflict of agency/structure by eliminating one side, i.e., structure. By contrast, a dialectical approach is interested in the inseparability of the two, and their ever present coexistence and conflict. Thus, viewed from this perspective, "Muslim women" should not be held hostage to their religious identity or agency. There is no agency or identity outside the complex web of social structural relations that are increasingly becoming global while, at the same time, remaining local. Identity and agency both change and are capable of challenging structural constraints. Certainly, resisting patriarchy in its Islamic local forms is primarily the project of women and men in Islamic countries.

Feminists in the West are also not held hostage to their religion, race, or geographic location. They are capable of solidarity with the struggle against sexual apartheid in other societies. It is obvious that Western feminists themselves have not turned the world upside down. Patriarchy is still in place, while new forms of male domination emerge and coexist with traditions of oppression. They have made great strides, however, in democratising unequal gender relations in domains such as language (inclusive language), in the classroom (inclusive curriculum), workplace, the parliament, and even in the church. These achievements are the result of intellectual and theoretical as well as political resistance to capitalist patriarchy. Western feminism is, thus, in a good position to contribute to the struggle of other women for equality. This has happened, to some extent, since the late 19th century when Muslim women relied on the experience of Western feminists in their demand for universal suffrage and other rights.

The postmodernist project of equating the universal and the global with totalization and totalitarianism is at best simplistic. Totalitarianism, in theory or practice, is a political phenomenon. It has nothing to do with the scope of generalization; even small-scale narratives can be extremely oppressive. Neither is totalitarianism related to size and geography. It can appear in small-size locations such as a family, a court, a classroom, a village, and in large-size spaces such as a city, a country or a whole region of the world.

The feminist movement does not necessarily become totalitarian by forging alliances on the national, regional or global levels. Women will be empowered if their practice is not constrained by theoretical positions which fragment feminist agency and subject it to the dictates of ethnic, national and religious traditions of patriarchy. Indeed, particularist theories divide feminists and deny them the will to act globally. One may well ask whose side they are on?

The great divide theorized by particularists fell apart recently in Uruguay. According to *La Republica* (Year XI, No. 3,768, February 9, 1999), a group of women in the capital city of Montevideo, "radically changed Uruguayan cultural customs" by appearing completely naked in the downtown Plaza Cagancha. Their purpose was "to fight against the discrimination, terror and pain that the Afghanistan women" were going through. The action was, according to the newspaper, "something never seen in our country, but these women received support from the people that were walking by and from people that wanted to express their anger of what is occurring to those women; even though it is a subject totally unknown for our country." The group issued a resolution condemning the gynocide conducted by the Islamic regime of Afghanistan:

Latin American women cannot ignore what the Afghan sisters are going through since the forces of the fundamentalists of Taliban took power in 1996. The victims of this crazy act of the fundamentalists are once again the women. Converted into hostages, they have lost all their rights. The ones that are not killed prefer to let themselves die, because it's the only form of freedom... How many women should die before the world reacts? Where are human rights organisations? What action do the governments that claim to be democratic take? We are confronted with a crime against humanity. The victims are women but the right to life makes us all (women and men) responsible. No to the genocide of the women of Afghanistan! We are tired of death! We are the ones that bring life to this world and we want life!¹²

The particularity of oppression has, thus, invited an even more particular form of struggle against it. The fully naked bodies of Uruguayan women was a revolt against the brutality of state violence inflicted on the fully covered bodies of Afghan women. Women in Montevideo broke all the fetters imposed on their agency by their own culture, and by the enormous physical and cultural distance that separates them from their Afghan sisters. The challenge for feminist theory is clear: can we see, in the particularisms of Uruguay and Afghanistan, the universality of both patriarchy and the resistance against it?

12. Report translated in *Voices Rising* (produced by the International Gender and Education Office of the International Council of Adult Education), No. 13, Tuesday, 23 Feb 1999, can be reached at repem@chasque.apc.org. The translation of the quoted sections are edited.a

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The politics of theorizing 'Islamic Feminism'

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Biography

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Women in Iran Since 1979*

Nikkir Keddie

Although all countries are unique, Iran may have claim to more surprising political changes in the past century than any other country existing continuously during that period. Among these changes have been notable alterations in women's roles and status. The birth of urban mass politics during the constitutional revolution of 1906-11 saw women's first political activism, which continued after World War 1, though that independence was eventually much diminished under the new Pahlavi dynasty of Reza Shah (1921-41) (Afary, 1996; Bayat, 1978; Paidar, 1995; Sanasarian, 1982). Reza Shah forcibly unveiled women in the 1936-41 period, thus going further than his model, Ataturk, in Turkey, and took steps promoting women's public education at all levels. His civil code regarding women and personal status was mostly a codification of Islamic law, however, and favored males in many ways. A return to more constitutional rule in the 1941-53 period saw the rise of the first successful mass nationalist movement in an independent country in the global South, with the nationalization of the hugely important British-owned oil company. In the politics of this time women participated mostly as members of nationalist or leftist parties. After the overthrow of nationalist prime minister Mosaddeq in 1953, with U.S. and British complicity, there was a return to ever more autocratic royal rule under Mohammad Reza Shah, who again homogenized women's organizations and created an umbrella organization with royal patronage, while at the same time accepting as part of his modernization program some women's proposals to better women's legal and educational position.

As part of his "White Revolution" from 1962 on, the shah ratified important women's rights measures, including votes for women and especially the Family Protection Law of 1967, modified in women's favor in 1975. While the Civil Code of Reza Shah had mostly codified Shi'i Islamic

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law in matters of marriage, divorce, and child custody, the Family Protection Law moved in a more gender-egalitarian direction. Under it strict limits were put on polygamy; husbands could no longer get a divorce with only a thrice-repeated statement; both husbands and wives had to go to court for a divorce; and grounds for divorce were similar for both. Child custody, which under Shi'i law went to the husband and his family, though the mother kept boys to age two and girls to age seven, now went to family courts for adjudication, and could go to either parent. As Shi'i law, like some other Islamic legal schools, allowed special conditions that might protect wives to be put in the marriage contract, the main provisions of the Family Protection Law were put into every marriage contract as a way to try to render them Islamically legitimate. In the same period increasing numbers of women were educated and began to work in a variety of jobs outside the domestic sphere. Although these changes, which had been promoted by activist women, affected mostly the new, western-oriented middle class, they also began to have effects on the popular classes.

Most of the clergy (a western term that is applicable to Shi'ism, because unlike in Sunnism all Shi'i believers must follow a cleric) never accepted the Family Protection Law. A strong clerical opposition movement, in which the intransigent **Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini** soon came to the fore, opposed both the Shah's autocratically-induced reforms and his de facto alliance with the U.S., Great Britain, and Israel- and particularly what was seen as subservience to the U.S. The first targets of this movement were the shah's land reforms and voting rights for women (and also, implicitly, for Baha'is, whom the orthodox saw as apostates). A mass demonstration led by Khomeini in 1963 led to his house arrest, and his continued agitation brought about his exile from Iran from 1964 until his triumphant return in early 1979. From abroad he continued to attack what he considered un-Islamic laws and practices, and said that couples married or divorced under the Family Protection Law were not truly married or divorced.

To clarify terminology used below: First, the term "Islamist" came in the 1970s to be applied to Islamic political trends and at first had considerable coherence. It referred to populist Islamic politics that appealed to Islam for socioeconomic justice and antiimperialism, and called for a "return" to Islamic law, the sharia. Islamist movements enforced "Islamic dress" for women and most opposed gender-egalitarian, western-style legal reforms. Today, so many Muslims of different stripes, from conservative to radical or gender-egalitarian, from peaceable to violent, appeal to political Islam that it is often confusing to speak of Islamists now, as so much political discourse can be called Islamic, though its real content varies hugely. Second, rather than using the controversial term "Islamic feminist," I will instead refer to Muslims who believe in more equal rights for the genders as "gender-egalitarian", a term that I also use for appropriate secularists. Even though not all of them believe in absolute equality of rights, that is their predominant direction.

In the 1970s various Islamic political trends became popular among opponents of the dictatorial shah, who was associated with over-imitation of the West and subservience to western Powers. Among them were the predominantly young followers of the lay Islamic reformer, Ali Shari'ati; Islamic clerics more moderate regarding women than Khomeini, like Ayatollahs Motahhari and Taleqani; and the young, originally leftist, urban guerillas, the Mojahedin-e Khalq. Shari'ati and Motahhari both wrote treatises on women that interpreted Islamic teachings in a more gender-egalitarian way than did Khomeini, though they were less egalitarian than the westernized women's groups working with the shah's regime or the secular opposition (Shari'ati, 1980; Motahhari, 1981). The secular opposition parties, suffering -from suppression, often had their own women's groups and said something about women in their program. Though their stated aims were quite egalitarian, they actively discouraged any targeted campaign for women's rights as divisive, saying that once they attained power all such issues would be solved (Moghissi, 1996). Hence, many who most visibly worked for gender equality were middle-class activists at least partially allied with an increasingly disliked autocratic government, while those allied with the opposition during the revolution accepted the leadership of Khomeini, who stood against reform. Although today some Iranian women activists stress Khomeini's welcoming of women in the public sphere, including his turnaround regarding votes for women, before his death women's rights advocates stressed rather the limits he put on women.

Behind this contradictory situation, with most liberals and leftists ultimately accepting Khomeini's leadership in the 1978-79 revolution (though most thought they would have a leading role after the revolution and that clerics could never really rule), lay other contradictions. One important contradiction was the cultural dualism or division of society, found in many societies of the global South, but especially acute in pre-revolutionary Iran. On the one hand there was a highly westernized elite and new middle class, many with western education (before 1979 there were more students from Iran in western universities than from any other country). They were overwhelmingly secular and western in dress, culture, and politics, and often followed ideologies like nationalism, liberalism, or various schools of communism or socialism. On the other hand there were the urban popular classes and traditional middle class, or bazaaris, who had close family, ideological, and practical ties to the clergy and followed what they considered Islamic norms, including top-to-toe chadors for women, traditional marriage, divorce, and family practices. The rapidity of change under the Pahlavis, including major economic and cultural dislocations, the favoring of large, government-tied economic enterprises, and huge rural to urban migration, along with widening income gaps even if average incomes rose with the oil boom, brought much dissatisfaction.

The Iranian clergy, which was more ideologically and economically autonomous than any other Muslim clergy, included some who voiced the dissatisfaction of the popular and bazaar classes in Islamic terms. Partly because the unpopular autocracy had a westernizing culture, the Islamic culture of some dissatisfied groups and classes became a rallying cry for the opposition. In a situation where openly political groups and parties were suppressed while the clergy were harder to attack, the politically activist clerics allied with Khomeini became stronger in the years before the revolution (Keddie, 1981).

Some secular women in the 1970s went back to the chador or a more modern modest dress, often called *h0ab*, as a sign of opposition to the shah and solidarity with his popular class opponents. Some in the more religious classes became political only during the revolution on. Some adopted the ideal of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter and wife of the first imam, Ali, as an active woman chiefly lauded for supporting her husband and sons. During and after the revolution the more activist model of Zainab, Fatima's daughter and the sister of the martyred third imam, Hossein, who was said to have struggled against his unjust enemies, came to the fore (Tohidi, 1994). Just as the traditionalist opposition rejected many liberal and leftist ideas partly because of their association with western oppressors, so too they rejected western models of women's status and behavior for similar reasons and because they conflicted with still-functional and widely-believed cultural norms.

During revolutions various parties often try to convince themselves that their ideals will be realized once the old regime is overthrown, as happened in the Iranian Revolution. The secular leftists and liberals who participated crucially in the revolution expected a major post-revolutionary role, but instead, after a few months of freedom, they were one by one suppressed and eliminated from government by clerical forces from 1980 through 1983. Although secular oppositionists often call this Khomeini's "highjacking" of the revolution, it was similar to what has happened in many revolutions, including the French, Russian, and Chinese, where the strongest group successfully eliminated its erstwhile allies and monopolized power for varying lengths of time. For secular women this clerical monopolization of power appeared a wholly bad thing. A reversal of trends toward gender equality was central to the new culture and politics. Women were defined in the constitution in terms of their familial status and duties, and the Family Protection Law was annulled. An unreformed Islamic law was instated, including polygamy, child marriage, father or guardian's control of the first marriage, custody to the father or his family, free divorce for men but not for women, and an eventual minimum age of 9 for female brides. Women could no longer be judges and were dismissed or hounded from many governmental and professional positions. A government announcement of enforced *hejab* was temporarily derailed after a mass demonstration on Inter-national Women's Day, March 8, 1979, but was

reimposed soon afterwards. Veiling has become perhaps the central symbol of the Islamic Republic; the veil and “proper veiling” have become definitional symbols of a woman’s faith and loyalty. Although in traditional Islamic discourse the veil is related to modesty and morality, its transformation into a central symbolism of power has imbued it with a total religiopolitical significance as well (Najmabadi, 1994).

Despite this initially dismal picture for women, a combination of factors led to a gradual partial comeback for women’s rights, which is still far from complete. The pre-revolutionary reforms had been deeper and more popular than many people realized, and many women felt it when they were annulled. Women also felt the de facto post-revolution campaign that greatly reduced their employment and job access, especially in the public sphere.

In response, many women went to work in the private sphere and many became independent entrepreneurs and professionals. Khomeini’s encouragement of women in political life embodied a contradiction, because even Islamist women in parliament and elsewhere became conscious of the need to change men’s and women’s thinking and behavior if women were to have elementary rights. During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) the government called on women to be effective on the home front, which they were, and the war showed up some major contradictions. Notably, the numerous war widows, according to restored Islamic law, were to give up custody of their children to their husbands’ families.

Increasing numbers of women spoke and acted against such injustices and in favor of women’s rights, and over time changes were made in laws and practices. Though these are still far from egalitarian, that is the direction of most changes, despite a few recent contrary laws. At the same time, groups that were formerly culturally and politically at opposite poles have come to unite around specific issues, and this is especially true of women. Some say that the chador and *hejab* have favored this unifying tendency, as there is no longer such a gap in the public appearance of women from different classes. Whether or not this is so, it is unquestionably true that both men and women, both secular and Islamic, from both sides of the cultural divide have worked together for a number of goals, many of them women-oriented.

The history of women’s rights in modern Iran, only a small part of which can be told here, exhibits the features of dialectical development. Activism, encouraged by internal contradictions, brings change, and often creates a new “synthesis,” which is not, however, permanent but is continually altered by its own activists and contradictions. The pre-modern Iranian cultures and power structures that preceded heavy western influence could not preserve Iranian independence in the modern industrial world. They were followed by the modernizing Pahlavi society and culture, when urban areas especially saw a “two cultures” divide between the more powerful

westernized culture of the elite and new middle class, while the “traditional” popular classes did not accept this culture. In the 1970s these classes were joined by disaffected sections of the new middle class in political-cultural opposition. The overthrow of the Pahlavi state by an antithetical politics and culture forced people into the newly-dominant clerical-theocratic mode, which, however, could solve neither economic nor cultural problems, and increasingly alienated many, especially women, young people, and professionals. Out of this may emerge a new synthesis that is developing a more indigenously-based culture than the Pahlavi culture, a culture that finds more local roots for practices of gender egalitarianism and human rights. Human dialectics are never peaceful and much suffering and injustice have been involved at each stage of this changing reality. Nor is it sure that a new synthesis will be achieved; continuing socioeconomic and political crises might result either in a more dictatorial traditionalist rule or a collapse of the old system and culture, though most reformers today are hoping for a more peaceful near-term outcome.

Women’s Voices and Struggles for Legal Change

Despite the reduction in women’s rights and the strict limits placed on political organization and the press, dissatisfied Islamic and secular women before long came back with campaigns in the press, the parliament, and elsewhere that led to new discussions and reforms concerning the position of women. Women’s effective agency built on the extension of women’s rights, education, and economic roles that had developed before the revolution and could not be reversed merely by enshrining a patriarchal view of Islam- into Iran’s new constitution and laws.

Before the 1980s, the treatises and general articles about women were mainly written by men, whether secular nationalists who started writing in the late nineteenth century, Marxists who flourished after 1943, or interpreters of Islam such as Ali Shari’ati and Ayatollah Motahhari. The majority of women’s writings about women dealt with pragmatic more than theoretical issues, such as education, hygiene, legal reforms, and the like, and came mostly from secular women. Almost absent were women’s reformist writings from an explicitly Islamic perspective. The groups that cooperated in the 1978-79 revolution were alike in proposing that women’s problems could soon be solved if their own party took power, without any need for separate feminist efforts: Liberals favored further secular liberal reforms for women; Marxists saw gender inequality as based in class and imperialist issues and soluble once these were overcome; and Islamists said the problems between the sexes were based in super-westernization and could be overcome by a return to Islam as they understood it.

During the revolution the stress was on anti-shah unity, and the dominant theme regarding women as put forth by Khomeini and his allies was that many women had been corrupted by westernization, and that this

was part of the corruption of Iranian society due to un-Islamic practices coming from the imperialist West. This discourse came mostly from men, and posters calling on women to wear the *he0b* and behave in Islamic ways were put in the imperative or admonishing voice, implying a male address to women rather than women's own words (Yavari-d'Hellencourt 1998, p. 214).

The large-scale, organized, and very active participation of women in revolutionary and post-revolutionary politics and demonstrations, however, altered the consciousness of many women, and particularly popular class women, about their political potential. Khomeini and his associates, despite their strong traditionalism regarding many gender and family questions, including endorsing inegalitarian provisions of sharia law, had another side regarding women that was understandably rarely noted by secularists at the time. They insisted on the legitimacy and even necessity of women's political mobilization in the public sphere, and encouraged girls' education, once the few coeducational schools were made to meet the new rule of single-sex education, and also encouraged various women's public activities during the Iran-Iraq War 1980-88. Some women saw a contradiction between such encouragement, expressed in Khomeini's praise of women's activism in several speeches, and the simultaneous elimination of women judges; between his applauding of women's entering a number of university specialties and the dismissal of large numbers of professional women from governmental jobs. The regime tried to encourage women's work only in certain spheres, but many women did not accept these limitations. Although few women were elected to the early parliaments, many women kept their role in the public sphere, responding to dismissals from governmental and other jobs by entering private employment in imaginative and novel ways. They went in increasing numbers into other areas open to them, such as small business, teaching, medicine, and the arts (Esfandiari, 1997).

The women's press, which preceded the revolution by decades, played a key role in women's resistance to new restrictions on women, beginning with the annulment of the Family Protection Law right after the revolution. In essence, this annulment meant a return to the sharia-based civil code of Reza Shah, with even lower ages accepted for marriage, though women were allowed to insert protective provisions in their marriage contracts. The most vocal opposition to these policies, which meant returning to polygamy, reviving temporary marriage, free divorce for men, and child custody to fathers and their families, came from women, especially in the women's press and from women parliamentarians. Some of the women's press was conservative (*Neda'*) or at first limited implicit criticisms to depictions of women's sufferings (*Payam-e Hajar*) (Najmabadi 1998, p. 62). The magazine *Zan-e Ruz*, however, which had begun in 1964 but changed tone after the revolution, became a platform for opposing the new family laws and practices with arguments taken from new interpretations of Islam,

and it was increasingly joined by *Payam-e Hajar* under Azam Taleqani (Nakanishi, 1998). Women Majles deputies and other women made similar arguments. Against the official virtual encouragement of polygamy, for example, women produced Islamically-based arguments to strictly limit polygamy, positing that court permission should be required (as, in fact, in the Family Protection Law).

The polygamy argument is one where new approaches with some textual basis have been voiced in the Muslim world since the late nineteenth century. The Quran puts permission to take several wives in the context of the needs of widows and orphans in a time of warfare, and it is argued that it was not meant for periods when numbers of men and women are roughly equal. The same verse in the Quran that says men can have up to four wives if they treat them equally also says that no matter how hard men try they cannot treat multiple wives equally, and reformers say this should be understood as against polygamy. On veiling, the Quran tells women cover their breasts and hide their ornaments, and only interpretation said that all except women's face and hands were ornaments to be hidden. Other verses taken as referring to veiling are similarly doubtful regarding their original meaning. Some other verses of the Quran are harder to interpret in a gender-egalitarian way, but attempts are nonetheless being made today, often with sophisticated arguments by men and women with theological training. One main line of argument, in Iran as elsewhere, stresses those parts of the Quran and traditions where men and women are treated as equals.

The role of the women's press in these struggles may be suggested by highlighting their activity regarding a few issues. Women's magazines featured stories of women's suffering under despotic husbands, including stories of wife-beatings, suicides, and loss of children. Such publicity and activism helped to bring some legal remedies, already in the 1980s, such as limits on a husband's right to stop his wife from taking a job. Partly as a result of a campaign spearheaded by *Zan-e Ruz*, in 1984-85 twelve conditions were printed into all marriage contracts as grounds for women to get divorced, provided husbands signed them all. These were the same grounds as in the annulled Family **Protection Law, and**, much as in that law, special civil courts were to make the decision regarding family disputes, and, later, child custody. The courts were also allowed to allocate up to half the property acquired during marriage to the wife if she was divorced against her will (Paidar, 1995, pp. 282-293; Najmabadi, 1994, pp. 377-78). As the reformed divorce provisions were valid only if the groom signed them, the change was smaller than in the Family Protection Law, and this was true of some other legal changes that were achieved. Judges became more sensitive to women's rights as a result of these struggles, however, and regarding reforms that were checked by the conservative legislative process, the government tried to mitigate some gross injustices by providing instructions to the courts. These developments, involving the

acceptance of some legal provisions castigated as anti-Islamic under the shah, show the flexibility under pressure of what is termed "Islamic" and also show that earlier reforms had more impact than was sometimes admitted.

The granting of child custody to the father or his family at a very young age came under attack with the rising number of war widows during the Iran-Iraq war. In 1985 a bill was passed, despite conservative opposition, which gave custody of minor children to widows, even if they remarried, and provided government funds for their upkeep in cases of need. Khomeini's approval of this break with the letter of the sharia was followed by other such breaks. On the other hand, in another law at this time, only married women accompanied by their husbands were allowed to go abroad for study.

A difficult struggle occurred over men's unchecked exercise of divorce, seen as a main cause of a rising divorce rate in the 1980s. A limited divorce reform bill passed parliament in 1989, saying that (as under the Family Protection Law) divorces had to have court permission before being registered, though later studies suggest that male applications were almost never denied (Mirhosseini, 1993). Sometimes the same provisions that had been denounced by clerics as secular heresies passed parliament as Islamic reforms, and even where the literal power of reform was limited, the climate of publicity and struggle favored better treatment of women regarding legal rights.

A novel ideological trend for Iran, of women interpreting Islam in more gender-egalitarian ways, soon became important, encouraged by the entry of more religious women into the public sphere, the spread of religious education up to the highest levels for women, and the limitation of public discourse to Islamic parameters. Many women, not just those in the privileged classes, felt the shock of being deprived of many rights regarding marriage, divorce, property, and child custody after the revocation of the Family Protection Act, and many were hurt by the imposition of severe controls on behavior along with strong punishments. At the same time some women came to master technical forms of Islamic argumentation, partly because of the government's opening of more kinds of religious education to women. More women were politically active, and more girls and women were being educated than ever before, at the same time as a number of rights granted in the 1967-78 period were revoked. The few, Islamist, women elected to the first parliament were unable to get even timid proposals for women's rights passed by the male majority. But there soon developed a new core group of Islamic women, including some relatives of major political figures, who were able to press women's case with greater effect. Some reforms were realized in the 1980s, and that decade also saw women's entry into and effectiveness in a number of professions after many of them had been dismissed from governmental jobs. Women became

successful private entrepreneurs in unprecedented numbers, and more than ever before entered several highly visible professions, including university teaching, art, writing, film-making (including directing), and science and medicine. The women's press became both a profession and a rallying point.

At first the government tried to remove women from legal practice, firing all women judges, declaring their judicial rank null and void, and excluding women from the law faculty. Women lawyers refused to accept this; some continued to practice in the name of a male family member, others worked as legal advisers to companies, and women Majles deputies fought for them. The critical shortage of lawyers trained in Islamic law soon forced the state to revise the law and allow women to be advisers within the judiciary. A revised bill on the judiciary allowed women lawyers to be advisers in Family courts on matters relating to children. The law helped retain some women already in the ministry of justice retain their positions.

The lack of Islamic judges both allowed secularly trained advisers to assist the courts and caused leading religious figures to undertake informal teaching of Islamic law to young male and female lawyers. With the lawyer shortage, exacerbated by the closure of university faculties (including law) in 1980-83, several women who received this education and had good revolutionary credentials got quite powerful posts. Clerical opposition to women in the judiciary remained, however, and there was an attempt in the Majles to take away their advisory role in 1994. The women representatives, however, got the support of the speaker of the Majles, Ali Akbar Nateq-nouri, and women's advisory roles were actually extended. Women lawyers were now allowed to take charge of the custody of minors and act as advisers to the Administrative Justice Courts and Family Courts. They also got access to the posts of assistant to the public prosecutor, examining magistrate, and to offices for legal research and preparation of laws, and they could be legal advisers in government departments. By 1996-97 four women's legal advisory centers were created to help women prepare cases and to deal with the human rights lobby (Afshar 1998, pp. 116-125).

Women deputies pushed reform further, getting a bill through the Majles that told the judiciary to create family courts with the exclusive right to deal with family matters, including marriage, polygamy, divorce, marriage payments, wages for housework, husband's support of wives, child custody, legal guardians, and other matters. Every court had to have a woman adviser, whose views would be reflected in its decisions. By late 1997 women were occupying most posts at most levels in the judiciary.

Further reform included a bill ratified in January 1997 by which the *mehrieh*, the sum paid by the groom to the bride, often not collected until the husband's divorce or death, was to be calculated in terms of real value. This rendered it inflation-proof in a period of rampant inflation.

Though legal reforms have not yet succeeded on a number of issues, arguments in the press and elsewhere over them have raised many people's consciousness and reform continues to be pursued. These issues include beating of women and of children by men, and the legality of marriage down to age 9 for girls. The age of marriage for women has in fact been steadily going up with the spread of education and urbanization. In 1986 the average women's marriage age was 20, and by 1996 it had risen to 22 (Afshar, 1998, p. 148).

Reformist women and their allies also campaigned against killings of adulterers, which, however rare, were carried out both by individuals and the state. They were helped by a decision of provincial revolutionary courts to try to curb honor killings that were spreading in some tribal areas. Parliamentary discussion centered on the need for proof that the woman involved was a willing participant in adultery, and the law was changed to distinguish between rape and adultery. The law put the burden of proof on the man, and in strict Islamic law proof of adultery requires several eyewitnesses, who will be punished for slander if they are lying. Such laws are difficult to implement, and such killings do continue, if at a reduced rate.

Another long struggle in the press and in parliament was to increase the very few grounds on which women could be granted divorce without prior authorization by the husband in the marriage contract. A Majles law, rejected by the Council of Guardians in 1993 but then reinstated by the Council of Public Interest in 1994, extends women's right to request divorce to twelve cases ranging from the husband's impotence or imprisonment to his desertion or polygamy. It also makes divorce much more expensive for men. The marriage contract forms from 1994 also gave women the right to half the wealth and property of a husband who decides to divorce his wife without good cause. This change came out of discussions saying that wives were entitled to wages for their housework (Afshar, 1998, pp. 186-191). Very few divorcing husbands in fact pay out half their wealth.

Overall, major struggles and arguments in the Majles, the press, and elsewhere, resulted in changing inegalitarian features of the law, but these changes still fall short of the pre-revolution Family Protection Law, not to mention any more egalitarian ideal. The struggles and arguments continue, however, and support has been gained from some clerics, while secularists and religious persons continue to work together for reform. To some degree, since the reformist electoral victories from 1997 through early 2000 emphasis has shifted away from reforms in women's status (none having passed parliament during this period) to strengthening press freedom, civil society, and democracy, which many women see as preconditions to further expansion of women's rights.

The Islamic Republic's women's press, begun in the 1980s, developed and flourished (especially in the 1990s) as an important part of the general press liberalization of that decade. The weekly *Zan-e Ruz*, edited by Shahla Sherkat from 1984 to 1991, reflected the views primarily of women Islamic activists and included discussion and advocacy of several women's demands. Following a disagreement with others in *Zan-e Ruz*, Sherkat quit that journal and launched the monthly *Zanan* in February of 1992, which became notable for the high quality of its articles and for its gender-egalitarian stance. This journal combats women's oppression in many spheres, addressing men as well as women. It raises forbidden subjects and publishes important articles analyzing the judicial system in relation to women's rights. It carries articles by men and women, both Islamic and secular, including, recently, secular Iranian women scholars living abroad. Mehrangiz Kar, a prominent secular woman lawyer, is a frequent contributor and has written a series of articles about the Civil Code. The journal also carried articles by the notable reformist cleric Saïdzadeh, who has also written articles under a feminine pseudonym, whose argumentation shows them to come from someone well-trained in the religious sciences formerly almost limited to men (Mir- Hosseini, -1999, p. 248).

Many of the arguments found in *Zanan*, which would be called feminist by westerners though rarely (in public at least) by Iranians, differed from most pre-revolutionary feminist positions in stressing, or adjusting to, reinterpretations of Islam. They are based on what is presented as the egalitarian spirit of many verses in the Quran that address men and women equally, and often explain inegalitarian verses, such as those allowing polygamy, as due to special temporary circumstances. They present their view as the authentic view of Islam, and later inegalitarian laws and doctrines as deviations caused by various kinds of male prejudice and historical circumstances.

Among the important articles in *Zanan* were two from 1992, soon known to be written by a clerically- educated man using a female pseudonym, refuting the early decision by IRI authorities to exclude women from judgeships. Among other arguments, the author reinterprets a Quranic passage usually taken to mean that males are naturally superior. As is often done by Islamic reformists, the author rejects some Islamic Traditions (*hadiths*) as inauthentic and reinterprets others, concluding with a formula of the type found in Islamic religious decrees: "We affirm that the potential of women is the same as that of men whatever the employment and function; this goes equally for the function of judge or jurisconsult (*faqih*)" (*Zanan*, No. 5, June 1992, p. 23).

Once *Zanan* launches such a novel theme, the rest of the women's press may take it up, often in less radical ways, which is one sign of *Zanan's* influence. Months after the articles on women judges, the more

conservative journal of the Islamic Center in Qom published notes by the late moderate reformist cleric, Ayatollah Motahhari, who said that among the *hadiths* cited by clerics to exclude women from judgeships “only two are authentic and they do not justify in any way the prohibition of women to be judges” (*Payam-e Zan*, No. 5, 1992, p. 10). Despite the campaign, women still cannot be regular judges, though since 1995 they can be consulting judges, especially in matters regarding the family and minors. Their judgments are, often pro forma, countersigned by a male judge.

Another issue launched by a *Zanan* article in 1992 was the competence of women to be clerical “sources of imitation” and make religious judgments binding on their followers, a practice already accepted by many. The same male using a female pseudonym launched this discussion (*Zanan* No. 8, September, 1992, pp. 2432). Clerics have tried, even if they recognize competent women’s judgments in family questions, to limit women’s binding judgments to the family sphere. Motahhari’s notes, published in *Payam-e Zan*, said that there was no basis for women’s exclusion from definitive rulings in other spheres, that “if a woman is more knowledgeable than men, we are not only authorized to follow her but have the duty to do so” (*Payam-e Zan*, no. 11, 1993, p. 11). Going further, the women’s journal *Zan-e Ruz* reported a statement by another cleric saying that the constitution’s use of the term “man” in describing the president of Iran was as a generic rather than a limitation to the male gender (*Zan-e Ruz*, no. 1440, 12/25/93, pp. 14-17). This opened another discussion as well as action by women to present themselves as candidates in the 1997 presidential elections, although their candidacies were disallowed.

The advancement of women’s causes, while primarily due to cooperation between secular and Islamic female activists, has required the growing involvement not only of secular men but also of reformist clerics of high status and education. They are a minority among the high clergy and often must choose their words and arguments carefully in order to operate in a clerical context still dominated by conservatism in the sphere of gender and the family (Mir-Hosseini, 1999). All of these current allies have changed their immediate post-revolutionary positions in order to be able to work together. As stated in an interview by the prominent secularist lawyer Mehrangiz Kar in 1996:

We cannot speak of an agreement [between secularists and Islamists] but rather of a moderation of positions on both sides. Our meetings are in no way official or political; we discuss women’s problems. There are still many reservations on both sides, but underneath an apparent silence one may already see an adjustment of the different modes of thought and a cultural maturity beginning to emerge. It may be via women that this divided society will find its social and cultural cohesion again ... The revolution gave women confidence in

themselves. With all the sacrifices they made, Iranian women know how much their current and future rulers owe them and that egalitarian rights are part of what is due to them. This demand is no longer that of a group of women; it is a nationwide one. The Islamic government cannot escape it without risking a brutal separation of the state and religion (Yavari-d'Hellencourt, 1998, p. 226).

These alliances have not taken place without major dissensions and disagreements both within the clergy and within the differing feminine camps over tactics and basic ideas (Mir-Hosseini, 1999; Moghissi, 1999). Among men it is not only reformist clerics who are involved in advocating equal rights, but also many laymen. The arguments of reformist clerics are, however, especially important in the continuing situation of predominantly Islamic discourse, in which the formulations mastered by trained clerics have a special prestige. The boldest among them is Hojjat ol-Islam. Mohsen Saïdzadeh, a regular co contributor to *Zanan* and the author of pseudonymous articles cited above. He was recently imprisoned for some of his words, and has been a leader in opening a new approach in Islamic law to the rights of women (Yavari d'Hellencourt, 1998, p. 227, and Mir-Hosseini, 1999).

A movement launched mainly to gain or regain rights for women in the Islamic Republic could have an ever-broader impact on the reinterpretation of Islamic texts not only in Iran but beyond its borders. Reformist interpretations of Islam are not new, but in the Middle East they have not hitherto used such theologically sophisticated arguments, or been adopted by so many traditionally-educated clerics or by so many women from a variety of social backgrounds. Some have suggested that Islam needs to be interpreted not only according to the needs of today, but that revisions should be made in light of contemporary thought and philosophy (Najmabadi, 1999, p. 66). Modern western philosophers are now taught in some seminaries and cited by Islamic reformers. Although hostility to western and non-Islamic thought, and to explicit feminism, is strong in some circles, it is far weaker overall than in the immediate revolutionary period. Encouraged by participation in U.N. conferences and organizations and by the greater freedom of expression from 1997 through at least part of 2000, the Iranian women's movement has to its credit a record of important international interactions as well as the number of changes it has brought to Iran (Tohidi, 2000).

Summarizing the major political role of the women's press, Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud notes the growing role of Islamic modernism and reformism, and adds:

Women's magazines ... are playing a critical role in this transformation. The aim of these magazines, which attempt to reach both educated women and the political and religious elite, is to promote women's aims by pointing out the regime's legal, social and

economic shortcomings while advocating changes in civil, penal and constitutional laws. The editors of these publications unanimously maintain that the inequality between men and women springs not from the Qur'an, but from religious authorities' misinterpretation of divine laws. These magazines, which play a crucial role in disseminating intellectual debates on women's issues and concerns, enhance women's social and political awareness and create contexts for women's political interaction with the ruling elite. They also highlight contributions by reformist clerics, who are increasingly attentive to women's claims that Islamic laws must be adapted to the realities of contemporary Iranian society, in which women's social, economic, political and cultural activities have become integral. Political and religious authorities, aware of the significant social impact of these magazines, often respond to the critical articles they publish (Kian-Thiébaud 1999, p. 15).

Kian-Thiébaud goes on to note the unprecedented gender solidarity among Islamic and secular activists, listing as prominent examples Mehrangiz Kar, the jurist Shirin Ebadi, the professor Zhahleh Shaditalab, and the film director Tahmineh Milani as regular contributors to women's magazines. All these magazines have, in theory, an Islamic orientation, but many include such secular contributors. In a revealing interview, the editor of the Islamist woman's magazine, *Farzaneh*, spoke to Kian of the need to change from the early Islamist policy of excluding secular women, which hurt all women. Magazines like *Zanan* and the new *Jens-e Dovvom* (*The Second Sex*) have recently published articles by Iranian women and men who have long lived abroad, which has sometimes caused trouble for these publications.

The reformist role of women not in the press should not be minimized. Women in politics, including unnamed ones involved in varying forms of group pressure, or women showing their capability in a variety of jobs, have played a significant role in effecting reform. The women's press, like the press in general, has been key to organizing pressure for reform and change, and it evolved amazingly once limitations on press freedom were relaxed. This was true until April 2000 despite the periodic suspensions or shutdowns of newspapers, which often reappeared under new names, although the closing of the newspaper *Zan* was longer-lasting and more harmful to women's causes. The wholesale shutdown of the reformist press in April 2000 between two rounds of reformist electoral victories was a new phenomenon.

Conservatives who say that Islam decrees different rights for women and men continue to play important roles in government and clerical institutions, and despite major advances for women much remains to be done regarding women's legal rights. Recent events combining press and politics highlight more negative aspects of the struggle for women's rights, including some backlash against women and the continued power of

conservatism, even among Majles women deputies. In 1999 two bills were proposed in the conservative-dominated Majles, one prohibiting the "exploitation" of women's images in publications, which passed, and the other mandating gender segregation in medicine, with only women doctors to treat women. Though the latter lost for reasons of its impracticality, only two of the fourteen women's deputies opposed these measures. Before the February Majles elections, *Zanan* held a public meeting for Majles women deputies, attended mostly by secularists, which only three of the fourteen women deputies attended. These deputies complained that the media, especially since the closing of *Zan*, devoted almost no attention to their activities for women, or to women's questions (*Bad jens*, March 13, 2000). While this may be an exaggeration, it seems true that reforms favoring women were less emphasized in the press and parliament after Khatami's reformist presidential victory in 1997 than before, probably because of a desire for unity around a universal program of human rights and political freedoms, which many activists thought would lead to new gender reforms. Some activists believe it is now wrong to work with the clerical structure for reform, and if reactionary governmental trends grow or other major political changes ensue, more women and men may abandon the gradualist program and be less concerned with using Islamic arguments.

Women and Work

Books and articles often try to derive trends in women's work since the revolution from statistics, especially census figures. While such derivations are of use, they contain so many problems that they must be used with great caution, as many who work with them note. It is not surprising that different authors working with statistics have come up with very different conclusions (Moghadam, 1988; Moghissi, 1999). For one thing, the census was run in 1976 and 1986, so it is difficult to tell what trends were due to the revolution of 1979. More important, the census, like many in the global South, seriously undercounts women's work, even when it produces income. The low figures for women's work in the countryside, including among nomads, are essentially meaningless as indicators of women's contribution to the economy and to household income. Anyone who has observed rural and tribal women can see how much work they do, often much more than the men. This includes caring for animals and plants, working in the harvest, gathering food, and doing all the weaving of carpets and flat weave items, many of which are sold and contribute significantly to family income. These rural and tribal women are usually not counted as in the labor force. When, in the 1970's, I asked an Iranian involved in planning the census about this, he said that because they figured that the total work done by a family was equal to the full-time work of one man, given seasonal underemployment, the best thing was to count most families as one man! My observations of the countryside would support Tohidi's view, supported by a detailed local study, that rural women's labor contribution may be greater than men's (Tohidi, 1994, p. 117).

The situation is best described by Maryam Poya, who uses extensive observation and interviews in addition to official figures. She writes:

... my interviews show that official statistics do not include categories of women workers who effectively contribute to their families' and to the national and international economy. These are unpaid agricultural workers and carpetweavers, petty commodity producers, and a large number of women workers who are employed by many medium or small private enterprises, whose employers do not declare them as their workforce, in order to evade paying tax and insurance (Poya, 1999, p. 19).

In interviewing rural women Poya found:

Those whom I interviewed said that they had never been asked by officials whether they work or not: the officials who visit villages ask men ... about members' economic activities. Interviewees also said that women's contribution is considered (by men and women) as natural and part of domestic life rather than belonging to a particular category such as agricultural work or carpet-weaving. Many women workers, therefore, do not appear in the official statistics (Poya, 1999, pp. 19-20).

Poya's experience observing and interviewing Iranian women over several years leads her to doubt not only the official figures regarding women workers, but also the implication of these figures that more women work in the public than in the private sphere; Poya asserts the opposite. She says that many women are small commodity-producers and traders, including some making a living by buying cheaply from the rationing system and selling on the black market.

Many of my interviewees who worked for medium or small private enterprises told me that none of them was registered as a worker. This was confirmed by my observation in 1992, when I counted 150 shops in one street in northern Tehran selling female clothes ... on average, each shop employed three women at different times of the day, and none of them was registered as a worker.

Thus, the oral evidence and my observation led me to find out, first, that despite the official statistics which show that a large number of women work for the state, a much larger number of women work for small private enterprises (Poya, 1999, p. 20).

Poya's work does, however, support Moghadam's view that since the revolution few working-class women work in large industries or in the other better-paid sectors (Moghadam, 1994). Poya shows that even women receiving money for their work are seriously undercounted.

Aside from the large number of working-class women in a now predominantly urban Iran, women have made their mark in a great variety

of middle class professions. Women who lost jobs or were shut out after the revolution were more resourceful in carving out new working lives than similar men, often relatives, in similar situations (Esfandiari, 1997). These women set up small businesses and went in unprecedented numbers into professions like medicine and law as well as writing and the arts, including a significant presence in all aspects of filmmaking. I will not try to guess at what proportion of women are now working, except to say that even if only women who are remunerated are counted, the figure must be significantly higher than the figures in or below the low teens that are often cited. A successful womenendored measure to allow part-time work without loss of benefits has encouraged this trend.

The status of working women, however, varies greatly by class, and particularly by whether they are paid at all and whether, if paid, they control their own income. Many popular-class women have no such control, and some of them (reasonably, in view of current realities) still feel that outside work is demeaning, rather than status-enhancing. Such women may embrace the government's stress on women's true roles as wives and mothers (Friedl, 1994). As family size has been rapidly falling with the government's birth control program and girls' education is rising at the same time as economic crisis forces more women to work despite widespread unemployment, the overall trend, however, is toward increasing public validation of women's work, especially work that utilizes education.

Other Spheres-Education, Birth Control, and Sports

Writing about women in Iran often stresses women's activism and government restrictions, but women have also gained from several government-initiated programs. From the first the government stressed programs for the "dispossessed," including education and public health, and, in addition, from 1988 it has developed one of the world's most effective birth control programs. All of these have a positive impact on women, particularly popular-class women.

The growth in education for girls and women at all levels has been dramatic, although in large part it continued the growth that began under Reza Shah, which started when there were no government schools and few private schools for girls. Although some parents have been encouraged by the government's policies of no coeducation below university level (there was very little coeducation even before) and by modest dress requirements to send their daughters to school, on the whole educational advance has continued previous trends. What has been more novel is the great extension of adult literacy classes, many of which enroll mostly women. Textbooks have changed since the revolution; they now depict gender-distinct roles for boys and girls and present few professional female role models (Mehran, 1991, 2000). Boys and girls, however, mostly follow the same curricula, and some claim that girls flourish in single-sex environments, though others note that some high school specialties are not universally available to girls.

Girls do well in school, and the majority of university students are now women. Of those who passed the most recent university entrance exams, 57.2% were women (*Zanan*, Feb. 2000). In 1989, owing to women's pressure, the quotas for women were removed from many university disciplines (Moghadam, 1994, p. 402). On the other hand, most girls as yet get only a primary education, which does not prepare them for many jobs. While the government tries to use schools and literacy classes to inculcate its ideology, the overwhelming reformist vote since 1997, especially among women and youth, shows that it has not been successful in this, owing to discontent with bad economic conditions and harsh limits on personal freedoms.

After several years of denouncing birth control as an imperialist plot, during which population doubled, the government reversed itself in 1988 and soon launched what appears to be one of the world's most effective birth control programs. The government subsidizes free contraceptives and sponsors widespread birth control education, involving volunteer female community health workers and sessions for newlyweds. If official figures are to be trusted, birth rates have gone down by over half between 1986 and 1996, although they are still well above replacement rates (Hoodfar 1998). With the continued rapid growth of female education and urbanization, two factors that correlate dramatically with falling birthrates worldwide, birthrates can be expected to fall further, which will ease many burdens on women and bring more women into the labor force. For now, however, the large number of children and youths, along with dramatic economic decline since the revolution, creates a number of problems for women.

Some government-initiated programs have also inadvertently encouraged women's activism, as in the case of volunteer health workers studied by Homa Hoodfar. Approximately 30,000 working-class volunteers have been trained to bring basic health and birth control information to women of their communities, a task in which they have succeeded, overall. Some have gone on to organize their communities to bargain for public services and improvements, and the women involved, as well as many of their husbands, have become more aware of their potential for public action (Hoodfar, 1998).

The story of women in sports is a dramatic area of advance, now involving far more women and girls than in the pre-revolutionary period. There is not space to detail it here, but it should be stressed that this is a major area of successful women's and political struggles. The sport scene has been transformed from one where the government discouraged women's sports to one where a large number of team and individual sports are pursued by evergrowing numbers of girls and women. Sports are Islamically legitimized by permitting sports that involve showing the body to be played where only other women are present. Women are also increasingly participating in sports where they are seen by men, including

skiing, water-skiing, and bicycling, however encumbering the clothing they still must wear. Bodily conditioning is one aspect of women's growing empowerment (Sciolino, 1997).

Evaluating the Present and Future

Women's rights, like other issues, are today in a context where very different forces hold significant power. The presidential elections of 1997 gave an overwhelming victory to the reformist president Khatami, based largely on the votes of women and young people. This created a situation of divided power, where the "leader" Khamenei and the conservative forces held more power than the president, but nonetheless permitted some reforms, notably greater freedom of the press and the appointment of reformists to high positions, including one female vice-president. While women's roles in employment, sports, the arts and the press have continued to advance, there has also been some backlash. The two 1999 bills regarding medicine and the depiction of women in the press were examples of conservatism and backlash, as were acts of terrorism against reformers. The victory for reformers in the 2000 parliamentary elections was a gain for reformist women, though, in view of conservative actions against the reformists, it is too soon to say what impact the elections will have on women's rights. As this is written the reformists have won the second round of parliamentary elections while the conservatives have shut down the reformist press and arrested several prominent reformists, including two women, Mehrangiz Kar and Shahla Lahiji, the publisher of a women's studies press.

The terrain of women's rights in Iran remains one of cooperation among disparate groups on the one hand and severe ideological struggles on the other. Despite the unprecedented electoral victories of reformists, not only are conservatives still in control of the major ruling institutions but there are disagreements among reformers inside and outside Iran. A minority of secular reformers have criticized other secularists cooperation with Islamic reformists (Moghissi, 1999). These criticisms cannot here be discussed at length, but they may be treated briefly under several categories.

Argument 1: Most of Iran's inegalitarian legal provisions related to the sharia are still in force, including legal marriage at age 9 for girls, the need for a father's permission for a first marriage, polygamy, temporary marriage, and almost free divorce for men and not for women. The achievements of reform should not be exaggerated, and getting an egalitarian interpretation of the sharia enacted at best will take decades and may prove impossible. Others may respond that pressing for reform within an Islamic framework has achieved important changes, and that this may be the only way to progress in Iran today. This limitation to an Islamic framework may change, however, and some activists have been alert to this possibility and have continued to test the envelope for more secular arguments.

Argument 2 Secularists perpetuate a false view of early Islam and encourage a reactionary world outlook if they express agreement with Islamists that the Quran and early Islam were gender-egalitarian and that what is needed is to return to the true meaning of the Quran and get rid of later, male-supremacist interpretations. This argument involves questions of strategy and tactics that are faced by reformers in many Muslim countries. Some Iranian secularists have avoided endorsing the view of early Islam as gender-egalitarian; rather, they have simply not countered it. Others, who at least used to be secularists, have endorsed the egalitarian view of the Quran. Endorsing ideas one does not believe in raises problems, but the impossibility of being entirely frank in today's Iran should be noted. Fortunately, some have managed not to say things they do not believe and have still been able to cooperate with believers.

Argument 3: Some secularists and reformers now accept postmodern, relativist views that do not see one cultural, intellectual, or religious tradition as better for women than another (Moghissi, 1999). This question is sometimes mixed up with argument 2 on collaboration, but it should be separate. One can be a secularist with a universal view of women's rights and still cooperate with persons holding different views. In Iran this can involve refraining from expressing some -views. A distinct point is that some secularists outside Iran now voice post-modern relativist views, especially regarding non-Western cultures, and refrain from criticizing practices in other cultures that they would denounce in their own. This is tied to complex questions regarding insults to women of the global South arising from past and present imperialism and Eurocentrism. It should, however, be possible to distinguish between words and actions demeaning or insulting to a reasonable person and empathetic criticism of practices in other cultures, as in one's own, that bring suffering to many women. In the Middle East this can mean following the lead of local women in working for change, as is now happening in the case of honor killings publicized first by women in Jordan and Pakistan. It should not mean objecting to such customs' being criticized.

This is more difficult in practice than in theory, but many experiences of Iranian reformers of varying views and both genders may provide a guide for what might be accomplished in Iran and elsewhere. Possibly, as critics say, no regime that styles itself as Islamic and bases its law on the sharia will ever become gender egalitarian. But this is not certain since, e.g., even restrictive Puritanism, which President Khatami takes as an exemplar, evolved to become far more tolerant and democratic Presbyterianism. The possible evolution to something parallel to Christian democracy (hopefully, without the corruption), a largely secular and democratic form of rule, should not be ruled out. This is what is suggested by the reformist thinker Abdolkarim Soroush. On the other hand, if the ruling clergy will not democratize, Islamic ideas may lose their appeal for many.

It is possible that traditionalists will not give up their governmental powers, and also possible that the whole system will eventually crumble and something else take its place. In this case there may be no more need for secularists to speak in Islamic terms, but this does not mean that today's cooperation is mistaken. While reformers should not necessarily limit their tactics to those favored in recent years, it is not clear that alternatives to cooperation among different trends promise more than does continuing cooperation, perhaps in new forms. A positive feature of this cooperation has been the narrowing of major cultural and political gaps between women and men; between educated/westernized classes and popular classes; between democratic emigrants and local activists, and between Western scholars and Iranians.

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Chronology of Events Regarding Women in Iran since the Revolution of 1979

Elfiam Gheytauchi

- February 11, 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers take power after a revolution.”
- February 26, 1979 Khomeini announces that the Family Protection Law (1967) is abrogated.¹
- March 3, 1979 Khomeini announces that women cannot be judges.
- March 6, 1979 Khomeini announces that women are to wear *hejab* in the workplace. (*Hejab* is Islamic modest dress which in Iranian context, at least in the early period of the revolution, refers to a scarf and long dress that covers women’s whole body)
- March 8, 1979 A celebration planned by groups for International Women’s Day is turned into a protest against Khomeini’s announcement about the veiling of women and banning of the Family Protection Law. Thousands of women gather in the streets of Tehran asking prime minister Bazargan to hear their plea. This is the time when Islamic forces, calling themselves *Hezbollah* (Party of God), attack demonstrations.
- March 29, 1979 Khomeini announces that beaches and sports events are to be sex-segregated.

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1. See Nikki Keddie’s article in this issue of *Social Research* regarding the Family Protection Law.

Chronology of Events Regarding Women since the Revolution of 1979

- April 1979 In a national referendum, 98% of the people vote yet for "Islamic Republic" The question posed in the referendum Republic: Yes or No".
- August 1979 Khomeini selects members of the Council of Guardians, a clerical organization with the power to overrule presidential, and Majles (Parliament) candidates. All leftist opposition groups are crushed by the Islamic forces. *Ayandegan (The Future)*, an independent leftist newspaper, is banned. The National Democratic Front (a nationalist political party) organizes a demonstration against the banning of the newspaper. The *Mujarhedin* and *Fadaiyan* (an Islamic leftist group and 6 major leftist group, respectively) are forced to go underground.
- October 1979 A proposal for the replacement of the Family Protection Courts with the Special Civil Courts is presented by the Minister of Justice to the Council of Guardians. The proposal is approved. The government then announces that many branches of the Special Civil Courts would be set up around the country. By 1981, there are 80 branches. These courts deal with family matters such as divorce and child custody.
- December 1979 The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is drafted. It appoints Khomeini to the highest ranking Sh'i jurist with total control over judiciary, executive and legislative branches (*velayt- e faqqih*).
- Family matters become the central focus of laws on women. Women are highly praised for their roles as "mothers". Article 10 of the Constitution states: "Since the family is the most basic unit of Islamic society, all rules and regulations regarding family should serve the purpose of preservation of family and its relations based on Islamic rights and morals."
- 1980-1983
Reign of During and this time opposition groups are eliminated. According to an Amnesty

Terror	international report, 6,027 persons were executed in Iran, between 1979 and 1983.
June 1980	<p>Khomeini announces the <i>Enqelab-e Edari</i> (administrative revolution), which requires women to wear <i>hejab</i> in all governmental offices. Later, Banisadr also asks women to comply in order to fight “the Western consumer culture”.</p> <p>Universities are shut down in preparation for an “Islamic Cultural Revolution”.</p> <p>Four women are elected to the First Majles (1980-1984):</p> <p>Maryam Behruzi, from Tehran. Education: sixth grade.</p> <p>Gohar ol-Shareh Dastgheib, from Tehran. Education: M.A.</p> <p>A’zam Taleqani, from Tehran. Education: B.A. A’tefeh Rajai, from Tehran. Education: sixth grade.</p>
June 1980	These female Majles representatives are (cont.) elected for ideological reasons. Even though they lack higher education, they are proficient in the Quran and religious matters.
September 1980	<p>The War against Iraq begins and lasts for eight years.</p> <p>A’zam Taleqani starts a women’s newspaper, <i>Payam-e Hajar</i> (The Message of <i>Hajar</i>), under direct government order. It justifies the Islamic family laws (polygamy and women’s lack of rights with regard to custody of their children and marriage contracts) by referring to the highly praised status of women as mothers in the Islamic Republic of Iran.</p>
1980-1981	The journal <i>Zan-e Ruz</i> (Today’s Woman), which was taken over by the Islamic Republican Party during the revolution, changes its content to Islamic codes of behavior for women. <i>Zan-e Ruz</i> was founded in 1964, during the reign of

- Mohammad Reza Shah, and it was largely apolitical.
- Editors: Shahla Ansari (1978-1982)
Firuzeh Gol-Mohammadi (1982-1984)
Shahla Sherkat (1984-June 1991) [she founds the journal *Zanan (Women)* in February
Gerami-Zadegan (1991-1996)
Mehri Savizi (1996- present)
- 1981 President Banisadr's cabinet proposes a bill that amends the Special Civil Courts Act of 1979 passed by the Council of Guardians. "In cases where there is no guidance on family matters either from the Majles or the council, the Special Civil Courts will base their judge ments in relation to family disputes on Khomeini's fatwas (religious injunction).' This amendment gives the clergy total power in interpreting the sharia (Islamic law).
- June 1981 The *Islamic Republican Party* (followers of Khomeini) dismisses Banisadr in the parliament accusing him of planning a military coup. A Tehran demonstration in his support is crushed and the Islamic Republic of Iran practically becomes a theocracy.
- The Women's Society of Islamic Revolution (WSIR) is founded by Fereshteh Hashemi, Shahin Tabatabai and Zahra Rahnavard. All founders hold Ph.D.s from American universities. They create the organization to raise women's consciousness regarding their new roles as "authentic" and "true" Muslim women in the new Islamic society of Iran. They do not declare themselves feminists.
- March 1982 A bill proposed to the Majles on the right of mothers to have custody of minor children (boys at age 2 and girls at age 7) after divorce is rejected on the grounds that it does not comply with the sharia. (Below this age, a mother is permitted

	custody of the children. After reaching this age, custody is given to the father.)
September 1982,	Universities reopen. Elementary, junior high and high schools become sex-segregated.
1983	The Majles passes the "Islamic Punishment Law" stating that 74 lashes are required for any woman who fails to adhere to strict <i>hejab</i> .
1983 (Cont.)	For the first time after the revolution, the Oom seminary, a prominent and legendary religious training center, admits over 400 women with secondary school education.
April 1983	Seminars are held to ensure a unified interpretation of shad a ascivil laws. <i>Zan-e Ruz</i> discusses the necessity of having multiple interpretations of sharia. In the same year, legislation is passed to grant special loans to poor men and women who want to get married. This fund, organized by <i>Bonyad-e Shahid</i> (the Martyrs' Foundation, which deals with matters related to veterans of Iran-Iraq War) in the midst of the Iran Iraq War, aims at easing the costs of marriages. <i>Siqeh</i> (temporary marriage) becomes legal, according to Khomeini's fatwas. (According to current Iranian law, marriage can be either permanent or temporary. In permanent marriage, no duration is specified. According to article 1075 of the civil code, temporary marriage, <i>siqeh</i> , can last for a specified period of time. In <i>siqeh</i> , the wife has to leave the husband's house as soon as the period of their <i>siqeh</i> is over, or if the husband waives his right to the remaining portion of the specified period. In <i>siqeh</i> , the wife is not entitled to any financial support, or inheritance, from the husband.)

Chronology of Events Regarding Women since the Revolution of 1979

- August 1983 A bill is drafted by the Majles Committee on Health and Welfare concerning the status of "unprotected women" (widows, etc.). The bill puts pressure on the state to help widowed women be self-sufficient. It is not enacted until 1987.
- Summer 1984 A special patrol is organized to deal with violations of *hejab* in the streets. These violations include showing of women's hair, wearing lipstick, etc.
- Summer 1984 (cont.) Four women are elected to the Second Majles (1984-1988):
Gohar-ol Sharieh Dastgheib, from Tehran. Education: M.A.
A'tefeh Rajai, from Tehran. Education: sixth grade.
Maryam Behruzi, from Tehran. Education: sixth grade.
Marzieh Hadidchi (Dabagh), from Tehran. Education: sixth grade.
- 1985 The Women's Religious Studies Center, also called the Society of *AJ-Zahra*, is opened in Qom. This is the first time the holy city of Qom allows a religious center for women. On the whole, in all institutions of higher education, many subjects remain closed to women. These majors include mining-engineering, management, and other professions considered inappropriate for women.
- February 1985 The Majles passes a law giving the Special Courts total power over rights of custody. Now, if they rule that the father is incapable of having custody, the mother can have full custody of the children. The laws regarding family matters are gradually shifting back to the Family Protection Law of 1967.
- April 1985 Khomeini gives a speech about the necessity of women's participation in the Iran-Iraq War. The Society of *Al-Zahra* in Qom calls for a mass mobilization of women in support of his call. Even though

	women never participate in any combat, this gesture has symbolic significance.
1986	The Women's Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran is founded by Zahra Mostafavi (Khomeini's daughter). In 1969 its bylaws are passed by the government.
April 1986	The Revolutionary Guards Corps, an Islamic military organization of volunteers, announces its program of military training for women. It begins by admitting 500 volunteer women.
1987	The bill drafted in August 1983 concerning the status of "unprotected women" is enacted. The government improves the pension allowance of the-widows of state employees who were killed in the Iran-Iraq War, to equal the husband's last paid salary.
October 1987	The Women's Social and Cultural Council is set up in order to make policy recommendations regarding women.
1988	Khomeini announces the end of the eight year war with Iraq. Three women are elected to the Third Majles (1988-1992): Gohar ol-Sharieh Dastgheib, from Tehran. Education: M.A. Marzieh Hadidchi (Dabagh), from Tehran. Education: sixth grade. A'tefeh Rajai, from Tehran. Education: sixth grade.
June 4, 1989	Khomeini dies.
July 1989	A bill is introduced in the Majles to transfer the power of divorce from the husband to the Special Civil Court (as stated in the Family Protection Law). Men's absolute right to divorce is left intact, but divorce registration now requires the permission of the Special Civil Court. Men are required by law to provide a sound argument to the court, which the

- court can reject if it does not comply with sharia. The result is to give women greater power over marriage contracts.
- 1990
Four years after its founding, the Women's Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran publishes its first magazine, *Neda (The Calling)*, which deals with women's legal rights in an Islamic framework. Its founding editor (who remains in the post to date) is Khomeini's granddaughter, Fereshteh A'rabi. Editorial Board:
Ashraf Borujerd
Sadiqeh Moqaddasi
A'zam Noun.
- February 1992
Zanan (The Women) begins publication. Editor: Shahla Sherkat.
- 9 women are elected to the Fourth Mailles (1992-1996):
Fakhr Taj Amir Shaaqi, Tabriz. Education: B.A.
Fatemeh Homayun, Tabriz. Education: B.A.
Maryam Behruzi, Tehran. Education: sixth grade.
Parvin Salehi, Tehran. Education: M.A. student.
Nafiseh Faiyyaz Bakhsh, Tehran. Education: M.A.
Manijeh Nobakht, Tehran. Education: M.A.
Marzieh Vahid-Dastierdi, Tehran. Education: M.D.
(in April 1998, this representative is active in drafting a proposal to have hospitals and medical institutions comply with sharia through the segregation of sexes. This plan is heavily criticized for financial reasons by doctors and health professionals and is finally rejected on those grounds.)
Akhtar Derakhshandeh, Kermanshah. Education: B.A.
Qadiseh A'lavi, Mashhad. Education: M.D.

- April 1994 The Majles passes a law allowing women to become legal consultants in the Special Family Courts and Administrative Justice Courts. Women still cannot be judges.
- June 1994 Shahla. Habib! and Ma'sumeh Ebtekar are appointed organizers of the Iranian delegation to the United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. They conduct the first meeting of all-women NGOs in Tehran in preparation. Total of 15 Iranian women's NGOs are recognized by the Beijing Conference coordinators. (Some of these were formed only for the purposes of attending the conference and were soon abolished.)
- November 1995 305 women announce their candidacy for the Majles. 179 of these women are approved by the Council of Guardians to run in the election. The Judiciary branch announces the employment of 100 female legal consultants.
- March 1996 The Fifth Majles elections take place. 179 women and 2,751 men compete for 290 seats. Fa'ezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani (the daughter of President Rafsanjani) gains the second highest number of votes.
- March 1996 (cont.) 14 women are elected to the Fifth Majlis (1996 2000):
 Fa'ezeh Hashemi, Tehran. Education: M.A.
 Fatemeh Ramazanzadeh, Tehran. Education: M.D. (gynecologist).
 Soheila Jelodarzadeh, Tehran. Education: B.S. (Engineering).
 Fatemeh Karrubi, Tehran. Education: sixth grade.
 Marzieh Vahid-Dastjerdi, Tehran. Education: M.D. (gynecologist).
 Nafiseh Faiyyaz Bakhsh, Tehran. Education: M.A.
 Qadsleh A'lavi, Mashhad. Education: M.D.
 Marzieh Sadiqi, Mashhad, Education: M.A. in Engineering.

- Elaheh Rastgu, Malayer. Education: M.A.
Shahrbanu Amani-Anganeh, Orumieh. Education: M.A. student.
Marzieh Dabagh, Hamadan. Education: sixth grade.
Zahra Pishgahi-Fard, Isfahan. Education: Ph. D.
Nayereh Akhavan-Bita'rf, Isfahan. Education: B.A.
Monireh Nobakht, Tehran. Education: M.A.
- October 1996 The first public sports event with women athletes takes place.
- February 1997 The first women's sports magazine is published.
Editor: Seyyed Mohammed Safizadeh.
- The international human rights organization Human Rights Watch gives an award to lawyer Shirin Ebadi for her efforts on behalf of women and children's rights in Iran. She is the founder of the Iranian non-profit Children's Rights Committee.
- May 1997 Mohammad Khatami is elected president.
Women vote for Khatami in great numbers,
- June 1997 A bill is passed concerning women's part-time work. Due to their domestic duties, women can now work 6 hours and get paid for 8 hours.
- October 1997 Khatami selects Zahra Shoja'i as his consultant on women's issues.
The hardliner Ayatollah Mazaheri objects to Iran joining the United Nations' Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women because it does not comply with sharia.
- November 1997 For the first time since the revolution, women in great numbers enter Azadi stadium to watch and encourage the Iranian soccer team in a game with the Australian team. They break down the

- gates and force their entry into the stadium despite the security guards' presence.
- 1998 A number of opposition figures in Iran are mysteriously killed. The first among them are Parvaneh Foruhar and her husband Dariush Foruhar, members of the National Party of Iran. A fundamentalist militia group called *Fadaiyan-e Navvab* claims full responsibility for the killings. Some from the hardline Islamic faction of the regime announce that these dissident writers killed were "enemies of Islam." Tension escalates between various factions of the regime. Independent newspapers play a major role in pressuring government officials to find and punish the murderers.
- February 1998 A bill concerning women's work hours is passed, in which, in recognition of their responsibilities to the family, 1) women working full time may, with the permission of their boss, work three-quarter time and have it considered full-time; and 2) women working part-time are protected by law from losing maternity and other benefits.
- February 1998 (cont.) In Civil Code 1082, *Mehrieh*, the sum paid by the groom to the bride upon divorce or death of the husband, is amended so that the payment reflects inflation and its real value at the time of marriage.
- Civil Code 1173 passes in Majles, requiring a female legal consultant to be present in the court during child custody cases.
- April 1998 Two provocative amendments are proposed to the Majles:
- 1) Any instrumental use of women's pictures that denies them "their dignity granted by Islam" is strictly forbidden in publications, movies and other media. An aim of this bill is to restrict new press freedoms created after the election of Khatami. It passes.

- 2) The bill proposing sex-segregation of hospitals and health clinics is reintroduced. Again it does not pass; the Council of Guardians rules it out because it is too expensive to enforce.
- Saïd Mohsen Saïdzadeh, a well-regarded cleric and a graduate of Qom seminary, presents an alternate interpretation of sharia, criticizing the proposed amendments on the grounds that they are in fact against Islamic law. He is imprisoned two months later.
- July 1998 Meymanat Chubak, a legal consultant, is appointed by the head of the legislative branch, becoming the first woman to hold such a high position in the courts.
- 1999 After 21 years, Iran, holds its first municipal elections, putting an estimated 190,000 officials into office.
- July 1999 After the newspaper *Salam* is closed down by the state for its provocative statements regarding the killing of dissidents, a riot breaks out at the University of Tehran. The state-controlled media-reports that, one, student is killed and many, are wounded. The, student coalitions, however, dispute the given figures.
- February 2000 *Zanan* reports that 57.2% of those admitted to the universities are women.
- February 18, 2000 Elections are held for the Sixth Majles, with 5,723 candidates participating. Iranians come to the polls in unprecedented numbers: 84% of the eligible population vote.
- Of these candidates, 417 are women. Jamileh Kadivar, a reformist woman candidate, comes second in the list of elected candidates in Tehran. Women elected to the Sixth Majles and their rankings in the election results, as of the count on this date:
Tehran: Soheila Jelodarzadeh (#9), Vahideh Alai Taleqani (#14), Elaheh Kulayi (#18), Fatemeh Haqiqatju (#19), Fatemeh

-
- Rakei (#24). Shiraz: Tahereh Rezazadeh
Isfahan: Akram Mosavvari-Nejad
Mashhad: Fatemeh Khatami.
- March 1, 2000 More than 600 female medical students of the all female University of Qom protest in front of the Ministry of Health in Tehran. The protesting students claim that they are deprived of proper medical training because there are not enough female doctors to teach them. The hardliners, however, claim that the University of Qom medical school for women has served as an ideal example of an Islamic institution, since it trains female doctors and all of their patients are women.
- March 8, 2000 Following the election of several liberal women to the Majles, there is debate about female representatives' proper *hejab*. Should women representatives wear *chador* (a long cloth covering the whole female body except the face), or is proper Islamic dress" (a scarf and a long dress) enough?
- March 8, 2000 (cont.) The first gathering of women since the revolution to celebrate International Women's Day takes place in Tehran.
- April 23, 2000 In an attempt to crush the reformists, the judicial branch of the government shuts down at least 12 reformist publications. These publications are: *Asr-e Azadegan*, *Aban*, *Azad*, *Arya*, *Aftab-e Emruz*, *Arzesh*, *Iran-e Farda*, *Bamdad-e Nu*, *Payam-e Azad*, *Payarn-e Hajar*, *Fatkeh*, and *Gozaresh-e Ruz*. (Many of these newspapers and journals were used as the sources for this chronology.)
- May 27, 2000 Six more news publications are closed, bringing the total to 18.
- The Sixth Mailes opens with 70% reformists, 25% conservatives and 5% independent candidates having been elected. This result comes after many recounts of the vote by the Council of Guardians. Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was first ranked as 30th on the list of candidates

elected from Tehran, and was one of only two conservative candidates elected from that city, is moved up to the 20th place on the list. Shortly after student demonstrations, Rafsanjani resigns, leaving the Majles with only one conservative representative from Tehran.

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(Un)Veiling Feminism

By Afsaneh Najmabadi

Contrary to what the title of this essay may conjure this essay is not about (un)veiling as a contemporary practice in Islamicate¹ societies— about which there is now a very lively and enormous literature. It is about how feminism itself may have worked as a veil about the veiling work of feminism as a boundary marker for secularism of Iranian modernity. My hope in rethinking the history of feminism is to seek out possibilities for the present moment of Iranian politics. I mean to be provocative but not accusatory seeking to unpack the implications of feminism’s imbrication in secularism of modernity. By unfolding the veiling work of Iranian feminism in its past history I hope to envisage possibilities for “building working alliances” in contemporary Iranian gender politics².

Let me emphasize at the outset my refusal to generalize the ideas of this essay to all Islamicate societies. One of the problems with current discussions of Islam and feminism is ahistorical generalizations. These

This essay draws on several talks and conversations: Brandeis University, 17 March 1998; Harvard University, 19 November 1998; and American Association of Religion, 23 November 1999. I would like to thank the organizers of each event for giving me the opportunity to present these ideas, and other panel participants and the audience for critical comments. Special thanks to Camron Amin, Janet Jakobsen, Irena Klepfisz, and Ann Pellegrini for many thoughtful conversations. My thanks also to Ghulamriza Salami for assistance in locating archival material.

1. The term Islamicate was introduced by Marshall G. S. Hodgson. Whereas Islamic, he suggested, would be used to mean ‘ of or pertaining to’ Islam in the proper; the religious, sense, . . . ‘Islamicate’ would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.” Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 59; emphasis in original. Islamist is used for contemporary movements and organizations that work for establishment of an Islamic government, how ever defined.

2. As I had begun thinking about this essay. I was coincidentally reading Janet Jakobsen’s *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference: Diversity and Feminist Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), which deeply affected my thinking and writing of this essay

generalizations screen away vast historical and contemporary differences among countries as diverse as Algeria, Turkey, Afghanistan and Indonesia to name just a few. My argument assumes historical specificity; it assumes that to understand what is going on in Iran today we need to look at the specific contingent configurations of the politics of modernity in that country. What may or may not be generalizable cannot be known from what is assumed to be Islamic, modern, feminist or secular by any prior definition of these terms. For instance the configurations of Islam feminism nationalism and secularism that are now unfolding in Iran have very much to do with the fact that an Islamic republic has been in power for the past twenty-one years one that came out of a mass popular revolution. As a very hybridized phenomenon, these developments go beyond previously dominant and accepted political paradigms. We have an unshaped and fluid muddle with women as key producers of it! Two concepts feminism and civil society, move through this complex reconfiguration and acquire new meanings, while crafting a discursive space more marked by opacity than transparency, thereby challenging our previous certainty about what divides Islam from un-Islam secular from religious. Consider this: 'The editors of Iran's two most prominent feminist women's periodicals, Zanan [Women] and Huquq-i-zanan [Women's rights] had previously been editors of Zan-iruz [Today's woman], a women's weekly published by the Kayhan Institute. This institute is possibly the most ideologically and viciously rigid Islamist cultural organisation in Iran (a self-conscious ideological state apparatus if there ever was one!) it publishes a large number of a large number of dailies, weeklies and other periodicals marketed to different segments of the population. How can make sense of this bastion of Islamist hard-liners producing a lineage of feminist editors? What is the meaning of these emergences in the overall political mapping of contemporary Iran.

Woman and the Culture of Revolution

The legal and social restrictions that women have faced in Iran since the 1979 revolution are widely reported. Seemingly trivial matters, such as the shape and color of a woman's scarf or the thickness of her stockings, have been matters of public policy and disciplinary measures. Women are far from legal equals of men. Despite years of hard work by women activists, inside and outside the Parliament, many discriminatory laws passed within the first few months and years of the Islamic Republic remain on the books and in full force. Many secular feminists continue to feel silenced, if not repressed or exiled, by the dominant cultural and political climate.

Yet the past decade has also witnessed an incredible flourishing of women's intellectual and cultural production Twenty-one years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, not only have women not disappeared from public life, they have an unmistakably active and growing presence in practically every field of artistic creation, professional achievement, educational and industrial institutions, political participation, and even in sports activities. It

would be tempting for a secular feminist, such as myself, to claim that Iranian women have achieved all this despite the Islamic Republic, against the Islamic Republic, and even against Islam as the dominant discourse³. Indeed, for some women it has been this deep existential sense of proving themselves against all odds that became the creative energy of their productions.

Yet it is not only oppositional energy that accounts for this creative outpouring. The rise of the Islamist movement in the 1970s in Iran signified the emergence of a new political sociability and the dominance of a new discourse, within which woman-as-culture occupied a central position. In this paradigm, imperialist domination of Islamicate societies was seen to have been achieved not through military or economic supremacy, as earlier generations of nationalists and socialists had argued, but through the undermining of religion and culture, mediated through woman. This centrality of gender to the construction of an Islamist political discourse turned what had been marginal, postponed, and illegitimate into the central, immediate, and authentic. "The woman question" acquired immediacy and urgency, not only for the discontented but even more so for the supporters of the new order. In particular, female supporters of the Islamic Republic were placed in a position to take responsibility for its misogyny: to deny it, to justify it, to challenge it, to oppose it, but not to ignore it. Almost overnight, words such as androcracy (*mardsalari*) and misogyny (*zan'sitizi*) became common parlance. Moreover, the Islamist movements' and the Islamic Republic's claim of representing the ideal divine solution for all societal problems put them in continuous contestation with feminism as far as women's issues were concerned. Outright rejection of feminism gave way to a hybrid dynamic of outdoing and embracing feminism.

New configurations of Islam, revolution, and feminism have thus emerged. A recent women's publication has listed over forty women's organizations (many official and government-affiliated, but a substantial number nongovernmental) and ten women's periodicals of various political shades, including a daily, *Zan* [Woman], owned and directed by Fa'izah Hashemi Rafsanjani, a member of the Parliament from Tehran and a daughter of Hujjat al-Islam Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former president of the country⁴.

3. See, for instance, Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran* (London: Macmillan, 1994); and Azar Nafisi, "The Veiled Threat: The Iranian Theocracy's Fear of Females." *New Republic*, 22 February 1999, 24-29.

4. Nooshin Ahmady Khorasany, ed., *Salnima -i -zanan*, 1378 [Women's calendar. 1999-2000] (Tehran: Nashr-i tawsi'ah, 1999), 230-32. *Zan* began publication on 8 August 1998 and was shut down on 6 April 1999, because it had published excerpts from the Persian New Year message of Farah Diba, Iran's former empress, and because of a cartoon that was considered insulting to Islam. The cartoon depicted a husband and wife being held up by an armed thief, with the husband pointing to the wife saying, "Kill her; her blood money is less than mine!" Iranian criminal code specifies a woman's blood money as half that of a man.

These numbers alone attest to the significance and complexities of these reconfigurations. A number of writers and publications speak in secular feminist language⁵. Others are activists and writers from within an Islamists. In its most radical tendency, as reflected in the pages of journals such as *Zanan* and *Huquq-i-Zanan*, it speaks as Muslim and feminist⁷. Although there is a history of reinterpreting endeavors, concerning women's rights, within Islam going back to the mid-nineteenth century, coemergent within the complex discourses of modernity, the recent efforts by many of these writers are novel in a number of important ways. For the purpose of my arguments here, the most significant difference is not only that women are prominent reinterpreters, but that these interpretative ventures are carried out in the printed pages of a women's journal, in a public space, rather than the private chambers of religious scholars. The authors are posed as "public intellectuals" rather than as private teachers and preachers. Their audience is other women (and men) as citizens, rather than theological students and other clerical commentators⁸. Not only have these openly feminist

5 Among them are Shahla Lahiji writer and publisher; Merhangiz Kar, writer, lawyer and activist; and Nooshin Ahmady Khorasany, writer, editor, and publisher.

6. For further elaboration on these tendencies see Ziba Mir Hosseini,

"Stretching the Limits: A Feminist Reading of the Shari'a in Post-Khomeini Iran~" in *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Mai Yamani (New York: New York University Press, 1996). 277-311; Ziba Mir Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Azadeh Kian, "Women and Politics in Post-Islamist Iran: The Gender-Conscious Drive to Change." *Women Living under Muslim Laws*, Dossier 21 (September 1998): 32-55; and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Feminisms in an Islamic Republic: Years of Hardship. Years of Growth," in *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). 59-84.

7 I am not using the commonly used designation for such currents Islamic feminism. For one thing, none describes itself as such. Some, for example, the journal *Farzaneh* explicitly disavow feminism. Others, such as *Zanan* have referred to themselves as feminists, but do not use the combination Islamic feminist. This is because they take their Islam for granted and do not see a need to mark their feminism as distinct from other feminisms. Their endeavor, at least for now, is to claim a space for women's rights activism as feminist; they need to distinguish themselves as feminist within a site whose Islam is taken for granted. Many of these women had been activists of the Islamist movement that over-threw the Shah's regime. Subsequently they became activists within the government (lobbying for women's rights, joining volunteer war-support efforts during the eight-year war with Iraq, etc.) Some joined government-affiliated cultural organizations, such as the Kayhan Institute. Others, whether secular or not, consider Islam as the given political-legal-constitutional frame within which they (have to) operate. The marking sign for them, too, is not Islam/un-Islam, but terms for women's activism, and more recently for democracy within the Current civil society debates and struggles. See also Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

8. This new public space for interpretation of canonical theological texts is in part produced as an unintended consequence of Khomeini's doctrine of rulership of jurisprudence, which became encoded into the new Iranian constitution. Where the jurist is granted the power of political rule and the constitution is said to be derived from canonical texts and to exercise power of interpretation.

reinterpretive ventures produced a radical decentering of the clergy from the domain of interpretation, but by positioning women's needs as grounds for interpretation and women as public commentators of canonical and legal texts they promise that the political democratization currently unfolding in Iran would no longer be a "manly" preoccupation. Moreover, by declaring their interpretive enterprise open to nonbelievers and non-Muslims, emphasizing expertise rather than faith, and by placing woman, in her contemporary social concreteness and her needs and choices, in the center of their arguments, they have opened up a productive space for conversations and alliances among feminists in Iran beyond previous divisions between secular and Islamist.

It is this kind of hybridization that has been received as a threat both by what are often referred to as "hard-line" Islamists and by some secular feminists. Both sides have translated these fears and apprehensions into demands on women's rights activists to "clarify" their position by drawing clear lines between Islam/un-Islam and theocracy/secularism.

Without implying any equation in terms of political power and repressive responsibility. I want to point out some of the shared grounds between these two responses, from two opposite corners of the Iranian political map. One is the issue of an Islamic versus secular divide. Both sides insist, although for completely different reasons and rationale, that this is a central issue that the middle ground dissidents and reformers must clarify.

Those activists working for change in an Islamic republic, however, have an interest in not defining what is secular and in resisting the urge to draw a line between what constitutes Islamic and un-Islamic. This is not an issue of compromise with a powerful and repressive state, though that would be reason enough. Nor is it necessarily a consciously formulated tactical concession. The Islamic government, not even in its totality but that faction of it currently identified with and coalesced around Ayatollah Khamenei (whose official title is supreme leader of the revolution), along with its popular and state-sponsored and -organized base (through the many state-financed social organizations) are the ones whose world outlook is centered around a secular/religious divide. They cultivate this divide by ascribing global meaning to every small or large issue that they conceive as a potential challenge to their rule. This is particularly so on issues broadly named cultural. They see themselves truly engaged in a culture war. From satellite dishes to computer games, from newspapers to films, from the color and shape of a woman's scarf to what you name a child, every small or big matter is linked to the terms of a global culture war in which the fates of Islam and revolution are at stake. Those who resist and oppose this totalizing outlook have every stake in resisting not only the specific lines being drawn as to what constitutes Islam and what un-Islam, what is secular and what is religious, but the very notion of drawing any lines that would demarcate a religious domain from a secular domain.

The forces of resistance and reform emerging from within the Islamist movements as well as from outside all existing political formations among a post-1979 generation (through new journals, student groups, local councils, grassroots organizations, including from within some government-initiated projects)⁹ are formed around incremental, pragmatic, day-to-day issues with a resistance to allowing these issues to be pushed over one or the other side of the secular/theocratic line. Whether this is a tactically motivated screening and silence, or whether that very divide is now experienced as disabling to creating spaces of resistance and change, I cannot claim to know. Given where many are coming from (i.e., Islamist movements), I tend to think it is the latter. Whatever the answer to this query, it is this very resistance to drawing a secular/theocratic dividing line that has produced expanded space even for secular forces.

Contrary to initial fears, for instance, that the emergence of women's activist currents, including feminists, from Islamist ranks would further jeopardize the already precarious social space for secular feminism, their very existence and multiplication into many feminist and gender-activist voices over the past decade, by muddying the clear lines of what or who is Islamist, has enabled feminists who speak secularism to find more hospitable and growing cultural space. The resistance to drawing such clear lines has been exasperating to hard-line Islamists set on keeping these boundaries clear and patrolled. Unfortunately, it has also been received as unsettling and discomforting by some secular feminists who often demand that these women clarify their stance and draw this or that line, whether the line of separation of religion from government, or the line of autonomy from men. This is quite a dangerous move; for if it succeeds in forcing them "to choose" instead of keeping the ground muddled, fluid, and shifting, it will constrict the transformative possibilities of the present moment. The fear that this kind of vexed hybridization will further reduce a precarious space for feminism, like the alarming panic of "hard-line" Islamists, arises from the particular ways in which feminism has been historically imbricated in the production of secularism within Iranian modernity.

Rethinking Iranian Modernity and Secularism

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Iranian politics of modernity has been marked by the emergence of a spectrum of nationalist and Islamist discourses. Within that spectrum, one notion of Iranian modernity took Europe as its model of progress and civilization (*taraqqi va tamaddum*)—the two central terms of that discourse—and increasingly combined that

9. For an insightful analysis of possibilities of democratization dynamics developing out of some governmental projects see Homa Hoodfar, "Volunteer Health Workers in Iran as Social Activists: Can 'Governmental Non-Governmental Organisations' Be Agents of Democratization?" *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Occasional paper No.10, December 1998.

urge with recovery of pre-Islamic Iranianism. Other trends sought to combine their nationalism, and the urge to catch up with Europe, not with a pre-Islamic recovery but with Islam, by projecting Shi'ism as Iranianiza-

If in this earlier period a diversity of women's rights discourses existed among activists how did the conflation of modernist with non-Islamic and Islamic with tradition and antimodern come about?

tion of Islam in its early centuries¹⁰. I am emphatically putting the latter in the spectrum of modernity for two reasons: first, in order to distinguish it from countermodernist trends, such as that led in the Constitutional Revolution (1906-9) by Shayhh Fazl'allah Nuri; and second, because later twentieth-century developments largely led to ejection/abandonment of what may be called an Islamist nationalist modernist trend from the complex hybridity of Iranian modernity—until its reemergence in new configurations from the late 1980s. Until recently, it had been a commonly accepted notion that, since the nineteenth century, Iranian politics has been a battleground between modernity and tradition, with Islam always in the latter camp.

Early Iranian nationalism, unlike many anticolonial nationalisms, was more antidespotic and anti-religious-establishment than antiforeign—reflecting the fact that Iran was not colonized, though its modern fate was very much enmeshed in the world imperial mappings. In the course of the twentieth century, however, an increasingly antiforeign outlook took shape: anti-British in the movement for nationalization of the British-owned and -run oil industry in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and later anti-American with the emergence of the United States as the dominant economic and political power backing the Shah's regime in the 1960s and 1970s. This antiforeign emergence within Iranian nationalism was intimately linked with other developments. First, since the 1930s a growing chasm arose between the state and civil society, a virtual void between government and the majority of the population. Perhaps more important than the reality of disconnection between civil institutions and governmental structures were the cultural and political repercussions of making this void a sacred delineation for dissident politics, the weight of which was so heavy that any hint of a dissident coming anywhere close to someone with connections to the government was enough to mark that person as a traitor. Second, the modernist trends that had striven to combine nationalism and its quest for modernity with

10. The literature on the politics of Iranian modernity is enormous. I have found the following particularly insightful: Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1985); Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Emergence of Two Revolutionary Discourses in Modern Iran* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1988), Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996), Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic, 1984).

notions of Islam were virtually (d)ejected from the modernist camp, as the latter became increasingly identified with either the Pahlavi state or with the nationalist, socialist, and communist Left. Islam became consolidated with terms such as tradition and regression, marked as an impediment to modernity. Third, since the 1950s Islamism emerged first as a challenging and eventually as a dominant (in both senses of the word) mode of antistate politics.

The 1979 revolution not only marked the coming together of these trends, but also began their very unraveling. Once an antiforeign, antinationalist, antiseccular Islam came to be consolidated within the first years of the revolution, the very exercises of state power, and other intervening historic events such as the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, began to change all these terms. Twenty-one years later, a different nationalism and a different Islam, oppositional and now even semiofficial, have emerged, defined not necessarily or even primarily through any organized political or social movements but through many local micro displays and performances, which are not so much opposed to official state politics but in a sense going around it and through it, at times acting as if the state isn't there, at other times demanding that the state be there. This aspect of the new dissident Iranian politics is not simply a result of government restrictions and acts of repression, real as these are. These developments are in part also a legacy of the antistatism that had originally produced the 1979 revolution, with its sacred void between the state and the opposition; this void has since come to be seen as dangerous and futile, as undesirable politically and culturally. We are witnessing politics and culture with a difference in Iran.

Rethinking Iranian Feminism and Secularism

Similarly, the beginnings of Iranian feminism were not marked by a boundary, setting Islam to its beyond. Though there were debates among women on certain issues, these differences were not consolidated as incompatible and contradictory positions, one negating the other. Nor was Islam viewed as inherently antiwomen. Anticonstitutionalist forces, led by Shaykh Fazl'Allah Nuri, grounded their political opposition to the constitution and to the reforms advocated by modernists in their interpretations of Islamic precepts. For instance, they argued that the establishment of new schools for girls was an example of abrogation of the laws of God. The advocates of the new girls' schools, however, also drew from the same sources to argue for female education. One woman, in an article addressed to Nuri, challenged his wisdom and authority:

If by your statement you mean that womankind should not be educated at all and . . . that this is the word of God, then please write down where God and his appointed guardians have said these words.... If you are then proved right, then tell us what the reasons are for such disfavor of God, the prophets and the guardians toward womankind? . . .

You may say that I have no right to dispute God's affairs. I humbly say to you that I am talking about the God that you have devised—a God free of justice and an oppressor of women. The God that we know and worship is far too elevated and great to intend such differences between men and women and command with no wisdom.

Our revered prophet, exalted and glorious has said that acquiring knowledge is obligatory upon all Muslim men and women, there is a very big difference between our God who makes acquiring knowledge obligatory for women and yours who has made education for women forbidden and against religion¹¹.

In other words, Nuri's clerical voice was not allowed to hold a monopoly of Islamic authority and truth. Women challenged him and his God, in their own language and in the name of their God.

The common issues of women's activism in this period were first and foremost women's education and next the reform of marriage and divorce laws. Women's rights activists diverged mostly on the issue of veiling, hijab. In the pages of the women's journal *Shukufah* (published from 1913 to 1916), for instance, some writers, such as Shahnaz Azad and Shams Kasma'i, wrote in favor of unveiling, while others, including the owner and editor of the journal, Muzayyan al-Saltanah, argued strongly against it. In other words, advocating or opposing unveiling was not the straightforward marker of modernity versus antimodernity that it later became. Within the ranks of women's rights activists themselves there was a divergence on this issue that had not translated itself into antagonistic positions of one camp marking the other as antimodern, antireform, or traditionalist.

If in this earlier period a diversity of women's rights discourses existed among activists, how did the conflation of modernist with non-Islamic and Islamic with tradition and antimodern come about?

A critical period for transformation of these diversities into opposing categories was the reign of Riza Shah Pahlavi (1925-41). One of the major issues with which Riza Shah's reign has been marked in Iranian historical memory is the unveiling of women, for both those who supported the measure and those who fought it. In its simplest form, the common narrative is that as part of his modernization measures, Riza Shah in 1936 ordered women's unveiling. For opponents of unveiling, the project has been seen not only as anti-Islamic but as part of a larger imperialist cultural offensive, with Riza Shah as an obedient pawn. Supporters of unveiling range from those who defend his methods (the scale of state coercion was

11. For the full text see Bibi Khanum Astrabadi and Khanum Afzal Vaziri: *Pioneering Mother and Daughter for Women's Education and Rights in Iran*, ed. Mihrangiz Mallah and Afsaneh Najmabadi (in Persian) (New York: Nigarish va nigarish-i-zan, 1996), 65-70; originally published in *Habl al-matin* (Tehran edition), 1 September 1907

unavoidable once several years of persuasion had not produced the desired result of mass voluntary unveiling by women) to critics who hold the brutality of the campaign responsible for its failure and what is perceived as the later Islamist backlash of the 1940s and eventually the Islamic Revolution of 1979¹².

There are several problems with this account. For one thing, it ignores an actual shift in Riza Shah's policy on this issue. As late as fall 1932, the government was opposed to *bi'chaduri*, that is, replacing the *chadur* with any other full-length outfit¹³. In a letter to *Shafaq-i surkh* [Red twilight] in 1930, Afzal Vaziri took the government to task on this issue:

The police, with extreme severity, prevent girls from going to school without a *chadur*.... If a girl of seven or eight goes to school without a *chadur*, the headmistress, on the order of the director of the Board of General Education, will throw her out of school.... People should be left free to choose; don't command *bi'chaduri*, nor stop women who discard their *chadur*.... The government should simply take on the duty of defending order and protect women from men's harassment. It should write down and display the duties of men toward women in public places and buses, and the police should first of all behave accordingly and then enforce these regulations¹⁴.

12. In addition to several memoirs, two documentary collections of government decrees, memoranda, and reports related to the unveiling campaign have recently been published that make a more thorough historical reassessment possible. For a full documentation of sources see Camron Amin, *The Attentions of the Great Father: Reza Shah, "The Woman Question"*, and the Iranian Press, 1890-1946 (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1996). As Amin has noted (270), these documents attest to the government's concern that local authorities should not act recklessly. In memorandum after memorandum, it is repeated that "utmost caution" must be exercised in implementing the campaign, that educational and demonstrative meetings must be held, that women should be persuaded (I through officials (that is, the officials' wives and other female relatives) setting an example for the larger population. Yet the pressure to produce quick results and the continuous reprimands and dismissals of officials in whose localities favorable outcomes could not be demonstrated produced a violent dynamic: where local authorities could not achieve central government orders through persuasion, they resorted to daily violence. This violence ranged from dismissing women who refused to unveil from their jobs, to pressuring local bath attendants to report on women who went to public baths veiled (sometimes through roof hopping), to instructing shopkeepers to refuse business and services to veiled customers, to tearing women's veils in public. The similarities between these measures and those undertaken by the Islamic Republic in the 1980s to achieve reimposition of veiling are truly astounding.

13. In the 1920s and early 1930s, an increasing number of urban middle-class women had discarded the face-veil. What had remained controversial was replacing the *chadur* with other full-length outfits, as advocated by women such as Afzal Vaziri and Se-dighe Dolatabadi.

14. Afzal Vaziri, "Mardha khayli zirangi mi'kunand" [Men try to be clever], in Mallah and Najmabadi, Bibi Kanum Astarabadi and Khanum Afzal Vaziri, 94-95: originally published in *Shafaq-i-surakh* 18 August 1930, 3.

When the second congress of Women of the East was held in Tehran (27 November-2 December 1932). Shaykh al-Mulk Awrang, a confidante of Riza Shah, spoke repeatedly and vociferously against unveiling as it was proposed by a number of women. Three years later, in February 1936, the same Mr. Awrang argued for the benefits of women's unveiling¹⁵. Something had changed between December 1932 and February 1936.

Second, in the current narrative, women are simply victims of Riza Shah's repressive policy of closing down all independent journals, unions, and political parties, including women's presses and associations. This account ignores that more than coercion was at work: women themselves were divided not only on the issue of unveiling, but also on how to relate to the increasingly centralized and autocratic government of Riza Shah. The differences on the (un)veiling question were voiced at length from the floor of the congress of Women of the East. A number of Iranian women spoke in favor of unveiling as a necessary step for women's progress. Others spoke for progress but in opposition to unveiling. The disagreements over how Iranian women's rights activists should relate to Riza Shah's government came to a head through the events of this congress.

The congress was hosted by the leading Tehran women's organization, Jam'iyat-i nisvan-i vatankhwah [Society of Patriotic Women, hereafter referred to as SPW]. The site of the congress was shifted from a private girls' school, 'Iffatayah, where the first session was held, to the private residence of SPW's president, Masturah Afshar (sessions 2-5), and finally to the hall of the Ministry of Education for its sixth (and concluding) session. This shift in sites indicated the government's increasingly interventionist role, mediated through a section of SPW leadership that aimed at controlling women's activism. Awrang officially opened the congress on 27 November. Mrs. Afkhami, the associate director of the women's section of the Red Lion and Sun (the Iranian equivalent of the Red Cross) and wife of Brigadier General 'Abd al-Riza Afkhami (her full name is not given in the records), informed the congress that Princess Shams Pahlavi had agreed to act as the honorary president of the congress. She was followed by Masturah Afshar. According to Nur al-Huda Manganah one of the leading women's rights activists and a member of the board of directors of SPW, this lecture was not what had been planned by the society. She recalled bitterly

We had set up a number of commissions [within SPW to deal with organization of the Congress] but Masturah Khanum would negotiate matters in the absence of commissions [behind the scenes]. I reminded her several times, that she was carrying things out without consulting the commissions and without informing other women, and that all women members of these commissions are very upset at her behavior.... When the

15. Ittila'at, 25 February 1936, 5.

Congress was convened Mrs Masturah Afshar's report was not about the positive activities and achievements of Society of Patriotic Women. Members began to murmur their discontent, "This report has nothing to do with us it was out of subject; why didn't she mention our activities and services why didn't she honor the founders of our society such as Mrs Iskandari and yourself (that is, me)?" After this untruthful report of Mrs Masturah Afshar, the personal side of which overrode the general interests of the Society, all the hard-working members of the Society who were committed to general interests, including myself who had carried the heavy burden of the Society's work, lost heart and resigned. After that, there was no one to pursue the Society's goals with steadfastness and hard work and reestablish it on a firm and beneficial foundation. The Society fell apart¹⁶.

What was the content of the "untruthful report of Mrs Masturah Afshar" that had caused such commotion and demoralization, leading to SPW ceasing all activity shortly after the congress? What had she said in place of reporting "the positive activities and achievements of SPW"? Afshar's lecture on the first day of the congress was filled with praise and appreciation of Riza Shah, favorably comparing the situation of Iranian women under Riza Shah to other women of the East, on the one hand, and to the pitiful state of Iranian women prior to the "shining dawn" of the Pahlavi era, on the other. While many Iranian women used the occasion of the congress as a platform from which to address the Iranian government critically and raise their demands, largely speaking to issues of women's concern, others were more interested in displaying the achievements of Riza Shah's government, expressing their thankful praises to him. When there were disagreements among Iranian women (such as on unveiling, or on whether they should demand that the government send women abroad for higher education), Awrang would intervene to weigh the argument along governmental policy¹⁷.

If Awrang had failed to stop women from speaking for unveiling when it was not yet government policy, he had succeeded in bringing a wing of the movement under governmental mantle. Is it possible that the change of governmental policy on the issue of unveiling was in part a bargain that these women had struck? The current dissident historiography of women's organizations not only credits (blames) Riza Shah with the unveiling

16. Nur al-Huda Manganah, *Divan* (Tehran: Ibn Sina, 1957). 15-16.

17. At one point several women objected to his interjections, saying that he had no right to speak at this congress; the congress had specified that only women could speak. At this point Awrang said that he was there on behalf of the SPW, and Masturah Afshar confirmed his statement. Note that at this stage not only could his presence and right to speak be challenged by Iranian women, he seemed to need to invoke SPW's authority, either because of the presence of international delegations or because the government's relation to women's organizations was not (yet?) of as secure and brutal a character as it is generally assumed to have been.

campaign, it often considers women such as Masturah Afshar, Hajir Tarbiat, and Sedighe Dolatabadi as traitors to the cause of an independent women's movement and as stooges of Riza Shah¹⁸. Kanun-i-banuvan (Women's Center)—a women's organization established by the government in May 1935 under the auspices of the Ministry of Education to lead the educational and propaganda campaigns for unveiling and other policies concerning women—is considered a state organization that was formed on the dead bodies of all previous independent women's organizations. But a woman such as Dolatabadi could hardly be thought of as a stooge of the government. She had been active in Isfahan since the late 1910s in opening schools and publishing a women's journal. In 1923 she went to Europe to study, and she represented SPW at the 1926 congress of International Alliance for Women's Suffrage in Paris, and upon her return to Iran in 1927 she worked for girls' schools in Tehran—many years before Women's Center came on the scene. She continued to do much of the same after the 1941 abdication of Riza Shah until her death in 1961. To me a more persuasive account is that for a particular period her trajectory and that of the government coincided Dolatabadi could be seen as using the government, as much as the government could be seen using Dolatabadi¹⁹.

Not only were Iranian women divided in the 1930s on how to relate to the increasingly autocratic government of Riza Shah, but on the issue of (un)veiling—unlike women's education and reform of marriage and divorce laws—there was as a deep division among Iranian women themselves. I stress this division among women because after the official ban on the chadur was imposed in 1936, not only did state violence enter into this picture, but, more critically, an unbridgeable chasm opened up among women. Girls were withdrawn from schools and kept at home. Women teachers who did not want to unveil resigned from their jobs or were dismissed—which opened up room for the immediate promotion of other women²⁰. Girls' schools that had been sites of women's public togetherness with women acting not only as students and teachers but also as citizens actively shaping "gender and patriotic sisterhood," now became sites of

18. Hajir Tarbiat and Sedighe Dolatabadi served as the first and second presidents of Women's Center

19. A similar process could be documented for many women activists of the 1950s through 1970s.

20. As my mother recalls her own instant promotion! Homa Hoodfar insightfully details how the imposition of the veil, contrary to dominant perceptions did not translate into universal increased opportunity for women's education and work. For substantial layers of urban women, unwilling to venture out unveiled, the government measures resulted in restriction of their education, economic activities, and venues for socialization, making them more dependent on men of the household. See Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women." in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham, N C: Duke University Press, 1997), 248-79.

division. As later recalled by women who accepted (or embraced) unveiling, schools suddenly “became empty.” Becoming empty obviously cannot be taken literally, since the very women who narrate the emptiness of these spaces were there to observe and report that emptiness. They had become empty only of women who would not (or could not, if forbidden by fathers, brothers, or husbands) unveil. The emptiness experienced was their site of gender and national sisterhood being emptied of those “sisters-in-religion” who did not return to school. In this site, all women who had wanted modern education, who had wanted to refashion themselves as educated mothers and spouses, to escape marriage, or to become professional, all who had been advocating reforms of marriage and divorce laws in conformity with the reforming spirit of Islam, had crafted a space of solidarity and common activity. All these reforms were considered Islamically acceptable. Not so with unveiling. The unveiling campaign as enforced by the government now expelled some from this common site. As with other measures taken by Riza Shah’s government, modernization increasingly became conflated with only that modernity in which becoming modern was disaffiliated from Islam and made to coincide with pre-Islamic Iranianism. It is highly indicative of the stakes played out on women’s dress code that official government memoranda of the 1930s repeatedly referred to the new dress code as *libas-i tajaddud-i nisvan* (clothes of modernity of women)²¹. Those who had sought to combine their quest for modernity with a reconfiguration of Islam were unmistakably marked as traditional and antimodern—an identification that has only in the recent decade been reshaped. This process changed the meanings of modernity, Iranianism, and Islam. Iranian modernity increasingly took a non-Islamic (though not necessarily anti-Islamic) meaning. Iranian secularism and nationalism were critically reshaped through the expulsion of a different kind of modernity, one that had attempted to produce a different hybrid made of grafting Iranian nationalism with Shi’ism.

Current accounts of the period, by focusing on the issue of violence or on the issue of struggles between the state and clerical establishment over societal authority and power, occlude modernity’s expulsion of part of its own spectrum to produce its secularism. Women activists and organizations themselves were critically involved in the production of these reconfigurations. In fact, feminism became a most privileged category marking Iranian secularism. Perhaps more than any other sociopolitical and cultural issue of contention, women’s rights issues—as the expressions clothes of modernity and clothes of civilization best narrate it— became markers of secularism of modernity. Feminism became a screen category (a veil) occluding a historical process by which one kind of modernity was

21. Alternatively *libas-i Tamaddun* (clothes of civilization), was used. See Murtiza Ja’fari, Sughra Isma’il’zadah, and Ma’sumah Farshchi, eds., *Vaqi’ah-’ikash-i hijab* [The event of unveiling] (Tehran: Sazman-i madarik-i farhangi-i inqilab-i Islami, 1993). 105, 148.

fashioned through the expulsion of Islam onto the beyond of modernity, where backwardness and religion became conflated as secularism's abject other. It is this historical legacy that informs the current fears of contamination of secularism and feminism with religion.

One consequence of this process has been that women's issues, as symbolized by the (un)veiling controversy, proved impossible to build a consensus around. Not only did those opposed to giving up independent women's activities to state tutelage withdraw and become demoralized, those who did not want to unveil stayed or were driven home. This is a chasm that only recent developments have begun to challenge and change. There is a reemergence of conversation and cooperation between secular and Islamist women activists today. Islamist women activists of today's Iran are products of the previous era, not only sociologically, as many have observed, but also in that the terms of "the woman question" they have received bear the markings of decades of sociocultural transformations. They take issues as self-evidently Islamic that their mothers' generation thought of as un-Islamic.

The emergence of a vocal feminist position from within the ranks of the Islamist movement over the past decade in Iran constitutes an important break from the past positioning of all Islam to the beyond of the modern. By opening up the domain of Islamic interpretation to nonbelievers and non-Muslims, by insisting on the equality of women and men in all areas, by disconnecting the presumed natural or God-given differences between women and men from the cultural and social constructions of gender, these currents have opened up a space for dialogue and alliance between Islamist women activists and secular feminists, reversing a sixty-year-old rift in which each treated the other as antagonist.

Conclusion

The purpose of my historicization of secularism, nationalism, and feminism is not to evoke some golden age narrative in which women were united and then became divided, hoping that we could reenact some new moment of unity. But if Islam, secularism, nationalism, and feminism are historically defined and in changing relationship, there is no reason not to imagine reconfigurations of these terms²². Thinking of Islam as the antithesis of modernity and secularism forecloses the possibilities of recognizing these emergences and working for these reconfigurations; it blocks off formation of alliances; it continues to reproduce Islam as exclusive of secularism, democracy, and feminism, as a pollutant of these projects; and it continues

22 It also brings to our attention the challenge of not reversing the bifurcation in the other direction, as it is already being attempted; namely, by considering Islamist feminism as the authentic voice of women's rights activism and secular feminism as some foreign importation. For one such attempt, see Anouar Majid. "The Politics of Feminism in Islam," *Sigms: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23 (winter) 1998: 321-61.

the work of constituting each as the edge at which meaning would collapse for the other.

The points I have raised so far through a discussion of feminism and Islamism pertain to a reconsideration of Iranian nationalism and Islamism as well. Like many other modern nationalisms, the dominant concept of Iranian nationalism has demanded the assimilation of differences of religion, language, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality into a unitary, notion of Iranian-ness. Citizenship seemed to require erasure of difference. But Iranian-ness achieved through such erasures could speak confidently its inclusivity only if Muslimness, Persian-ness, masculinity, and heterosexuality could be taken for granted. Iranians who could not take such privileges for granted had to masquerade as manly women, Persianized Turks, Islamicized non-Muslims, and heterosexualized subjects, in other words, keep silent—if not be silenced—on their language, gender and sexuality, and religious and ethnic differences.

If, however, we begin to reimagine an Iranian-ness that would entertain a different relationship between citizenship and difference, then the possibility that one can speak as Iranian and as Muslim, by explicitly marking Islam and Iran as separate domains, can make it more possible also to speak as Iranian and Jewish, as Iranian and Armenian—though it still remains tragically dangerous to try to speak as Iranian and Baha'i. To open up an explicit claim to Iranian-ness as Muslim and feminist could thus open up other speaking-as positions. Far from being threatening to secularism, feminism, or Iranianism, it could be promising of a different sense of Iranian-ness that allows new reconfigurations of these terms.

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Algeria: Ordinary Fascism, Fundamentalism and Femicide

Mahl

[31 July 2001]

What started in Hassi Messaoud, Algeria on the night of July 13-14, 2001 is NOT one more crime/violence/violation in the wartime situation that our country has now become famous for. A qualitative change has taken place. For the first time one has witnessed crimes committed not by the organised troops of fundamentalist armed groups (GIA*, AIS* and the like), but a pogrom conducted by ordinary citizens brainwashed by the incendiary speeches/preaches of a FIS* inspired Imam against another category of ordinary citizens.

In other words we moved from violations committed by a fascist party, to mobbing by people inspired by the same ideology. This damage, self inflicted by the people of Algeria on the people of Algeria, will now take generations to heal and has laid the couch for the coming back of the Islamists on the political scene.

The Facts

According to early reports from the independent Algerian press, during the night of Friday July 13 to Saturday July 14, after the sermon of the Friday 13th prayers at the mosque by an Islamist imam, Amar Taleb, in the Saharan city of Hassi Messaoud, the most ancient oil station in the country, a mob of 300 men attacked working women in the city area called Bouamama. These were mostly cleaning personnel and a few secretaries and cooks¹, all employed by foreign oil companies. The women had been imported from North-Western cities of Algeria, poverty being the reason for this emigration from within: their meagre salaries helped feed a whole extended family, not only the children of these widows and divorcees - but also parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, etc...² Witnesses said that the Imam

[1] « Cleaning women, secretaries and cooks » Le Matin n° 2856, Tuesday July 17, 2001, p.2, Youssef Rezzoug

[2] Testimony of Fatima, quoted in L'Actualité en Question, article by S.L.: She earned 11,000 dinars (US\$146.00) per month, for cleaning the apartments of the employees of the oil company she was working for, out of which she spent 4,500dinars as her share of the rent

accused these women of 'immoral' behaviour and called on the men in the mosque to a 'jihad against the Evil' and to 'chase the women fornicators out of the area'³, on the ground that since they were living on their own by themselves, that is without a 'wali', meaning the male guardian of the Maliki tradition, - hence they could be considered to be prostitutes.

In this process of "purification of the area", women were murdered, tortured, stabbed, mutilated and raped - including three young women who were virgins (indeed 'prostitutes'!) who claim they were gang raped⁴. Their houses were robbed, looted and some were set on fire. Security forces intervened at 3 am. The pogrom continued on July 14-15 in the area of Hassi Messaoud called 'area 136', and went on July 16 in the area called 'area 200'. On July 17 and then on July 23-24 similar events took place in the Southern city of Tebessa, where not only the houses of single women but also shops owned by women, such as hair dressing salons, were also attacked. In Hassi Messaoud, 95 women who have been attacked⁵, plus some that 'could be attacked' have been locked up by the authorities 'for their protection'⁶ in a youth hostel guarded by security forces. Till today, they are not allowed to leave the place, not even to regain their hometowns. They are sequestered without access to medicines and sufficient food⁷. However, more and more women gather at the gates and

of the room she shared with her cousin's sister who also worked for the same company. She commented: 'How could I refuse (this work), I who have charge of 18 people of my family, including five nephews who have been orphaned?'. 'They used to come together, four or five women in order to rent one room from a family house, or even a garage, for 9,000 to 10,000 per month'. *Le Matin* ° 2856, Tuesday July 17, 2001, p.2, Youssef Rezzoug

[3] « jihad against El Fassal », in *La Tribune*, "L'escalade à Hassi Messaoud", Youcef Rezzoug,

[4] « Among the 20 wounded women I saw there were 17 girls » *Le Matin*, idem « Three of them are in intensive care at the city hospital. Houria is 25 year old. During the night of Friday-Saturday, she was gang raped. 'They were about 60 men to attack me and my sister' she cries, 'I was a virgin and I never ceased pleading and begging them and shouting: 'Don't! I am a virgin!' . They penetrated me in all possible ways. One of the assailants pushed his whole fist into my bleeding sexual organ' she cries ». « I have seen a woman who has been sodomised with an iron bar, while the police, under order, did not move' recounts Houria ». *Le Matin*, July 17

[5] « Young women and old women, about one hundred of them, with about 20 children are spending the third night in a youth hostel where conditions of living are appalling ». *Le Matin*, July 17

[6] « Women who could be targeted at by the youth of these areas have been placed in the youth hostel by the authorities ... 'in order to better ensure their security' ». *Le Matin*, idem

[7] After visiting the victims Khaleda Messaoudi (elected representative of government) stated that the women 'have no use of speeches, they need medical and psychological care and to be rehabilitated through the legal persecution of the tortionnaires' *Le Matin* n°2859, July 20-21, 2001

plead in vain with the armed guards to be admitted inside: but the hostel is filled to the brim⁸.

Independent journalists report that the Imam and, depending on the reports, between 9 and 40 of the identified perpetrators⁹ - that included some of the owners of the poor shacks rented out for a very high price to the working women - may have been arrested by the police and could be in the process of being tried.

Background

The first reported case of an organised, collective and religiously inspired attack on women took place in Ouargla, another southern city of Algeria as early as June 1989, i.e. long before the end of the electoral process that is often invoked as an explanation of and, strangely enough somehow, as a justification for the crimes committed by fundamentalist armed groups on ordinary people. The house of a divorcee, named Ouarda, who was living by herself with her numerous children, was burnt to ashes by a mob. In the process, the youngest of her children, a handicapped child aged 4 who could not escape the flames in the night, was burnt to death. The police did not intervene.

The Algerian feminist Khaleda Messaoudi gave a detailed account of this case to an international audience on the occasion of the UN World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 - at a time when it was crystal clear that the war against women was part and parcel of the FIS program of sexual apartheid in Algeria. This first reported case was followed by similar individual attacks in other cities¹⁰.

[8] « The youth hostel is already full. The persons in charge of this place have refused yesterday the right to enter it to several young women who begged for it. ' The situation is getting worse in area 200, I want to come in' shouted a woman to the person in charge of the youth hostel 'What can I do,' he asked, 'we are not equipped'» La Tribune idem « They cannot bear anymore 'this prison' the gates of which are locked and guarded by policemen » 'Le Matin, idem.

[9] La Tribune, July 17 mentions the arrest of the Imam and of about 40 young men, and 4 to 6 deceased women. Le Matin confirms only 9 arrests and El Watan slightly more. Later reports mention that the Imam has not been arrested and that he denies having called for the attack on the women. The authorities deny that there were women who died in the attacks but witnesses testify that they saw several of them dead.

[10] «In the name of moral order which foments punitive expeditions, acid throwing at women in student hostels, arson in Ouargla, Remchi and elsewhere, assassinations, rapes, harassment of couples, the cowards always target women - women who are only guilty of being visible and dignified ». Statement of women's organisation RAFD (Algerian Assembly of Democratic Women), after the pogrom in Hassi Messaoud, published in Le Matin n°2857, July 18, 2001.

'The Coming Back of Inquisition': 'These two horrible nights unfortunately come to remind us of punitive expeditions organised by fundamentalist commandos who targeted women

However, it is in the early 70's that women employed in state owned factories in Sidi Bel Abbès (north-west of Algiers) were stoned by men on their way to the plant and prevented access to their work place. At first the police had to close down the factories. They later reopened but for several weeks women workers had to be protected by the authorities on the way to work.

Throughout the nineties, AIS and GIA killers attacked thousands of women at random: the list of murdered women established by the Observatory of Human Rights in Algiers is eloquent: it ranges from veiled to unveiled women, working women to housewives... with a special mention for women who earned their living by 'beautifying' women (hairdressers, aestheticians, etc...)

The Algerian feminist Zazi Sadou gave testimony on these cases to the international audience of the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1996.

In Hassi Messaoud, the assailants went to war against women shouting 'Allah Houwa Akbar' (God is the highest); they were also shouting slogans against the state ('down with the hogra' - 'hogra' being the term the Algerians have been using for decades to stigmatise the contempt and arrogance of governments vis a vis the people); they were also shouting against the women 'foreigners' who came to 'steal the jobs' of the local population¹¹.

from 1989 to 1991 throughout the national territory, and far before this phenomenon extended to the whole society and was labelled terrorism. Thus from 1989 to 1991 all over, in Ouargla, M'sila, Bou Saada, Jijel, Annaba, Mostaganem, Mascara, Blida, Algiers, etc... widowed and divorced women as well as female students in student hostels were submitted to moral and physical violence aimed at, according to these inquisitors, 'purifying society' by the fire and by the blood. What followed demonstrated that, by attacking the feeblest part of society and submitting it to fear, it is the whole of Algeria that they are trying to condition by terror. For a society that is conditioned by terror is a paralysed society to which the most totalitarian project can be imposed'. Statement by women's organisation RACHDA: Le Matin July 17

The organisations that protested within Algeria included: the National Association SOS Distressed Women that declared that it would file a court case on behalf of the victims in Hassi Messaoud; the National Committee against Forgetting and Treason, CNOT, that protested against the unilateral pardon of terrorists by President Bouteflika, and the International Federation of Associations of Victims of Terrorism - Algerian Section. Le Matin July 18

On the 18th of July, three women deputies including the well-known feminist Khaleda Messaoudi, went to visit the women who had been attacked in Hassi Messaoud. Le Matin n°2859, July 20-21, 2001

[11] « A youth states that he does not regret anything of what happened to the women for they are the ones who 'robbed the sons of the city (ouled el bled) of their daily bread (gagne-pain)' ».

All the ingredients of fascism are there: from the blessing of God and religion ('Gott mit uns' i.e. 'God is with us' was engraved on the buckle of the SS belts), to the identification and demonisation of a 'subhuman' category of citizens that can and should be physically eliminated (the 'untermensch') and to the scapegoat 'foreigner' who is held responsible for social disarray.

It is NOT the first time in recent history that the extreme right political groups and parties make use of people's discontent. Fascism has always built on the legitimate protest of the dispossessed classes, backed by middle class who fear that their share of the cake is not big enough or could be threatened. Fascism manipulates and subverts it and finally points at a scapegoat fragment of the population as THE cause of social disarray. There is no doubt that the successive governments of Algeria have progressively given up on the promises of independence to the people. The gap between rich and poor grows wider and wider¹². The mass of very young lumpen proletariat¹³ grows more hostile to the privileges of the New Class that not only ruled the country for its benefits for decades but also now openly loots it.

Social protest has been hijacked by the FIS party since the 70s, - long before the halting of the electoral process that could have taken them to power legally in 1991. FIS was the only political force that successfully organized underground starting from independence in 1962. It is the party that manipulated the first public demonstrations and riots against the state in 1989 and long preceded the democratic parties that sprung up after the political and economic 'liberalisation' of 1990, which led to the present enormous gap between rich and poor.

Recent protests, marches, demonstrations and riots that were initiated in the Berber areas and are now springing up all over the country, have attempted - not with full success - to articulate and relocate political protest in the class struggle context where it belongs, rather than in the religious terrain or the 'cultural' one.

In wake of this danger of a real political awakening and popular organising, the fundamentalist parties are launching an all out new offensive - the incendiary preaching of the Imam of Hassi Messaoud being only a small part of it. To it, we must add the raging rise of killings and violence against the civilian population (several hundred deaths a month for the past one year), the arrogance of the so-called 'repented' (i.e. ALL the former terrorists from AIS and GIA who were pardoned unilaterally by the President Bouteflika and came back from their "guerrilla personas" without surrendering their arms, to their villages and cities where they, again,

[12] The population growth is still 2.28%. 32% of the population is illiterate

[13] 50% of the population is under 19.

threaten people who do not abide by their rules (no music, dress code, etc.) and women in particular¹⁴.

But their main offensive is on the diplomatic front: more and more people in Algeria are extremely worried at the prospect of an alliance of Bouteflika with any one of the fundamentalist parties, and even by a total legal rehabilitation of FIS - an alliance that has been indicated by Bouteflika's speeches and attitudes in an increasingly clear manner in the past few months, after he pardoned the terrorists without investigation or judgement and declared the 'civil concordia'. The President has even warned women that they should not 'provoke the Islamists' by their behaviour¹⁵. This 'plot' is presently denounced all over the independent press in Algeria¹⁶.

The overwhelming silence of the international media on the pogrom in Hassi Messaoud and other cities speaks for itself: these events simply do not fit into the simplistic representation that they have given of the Algerian situation, hence they do not exist and cannot be reported. Until the early 90's the international media reported widely about the violations committed by the state against the fascist fundamentalists. Not that they should not have reported on these violations... But how come they did not report when the state was torturing and slaughtering the communists, the democrats and the secularists in the 60's, the 70's and the 80's? How come they barely reported on the violations and systematic crimes of the fascist fundamentalists starting from the 70's, then in the 80's? How is it that, at the height of the killings, in the 90's, when intellectuals, artists, foreigners, secularists and ordinary women were slaughtered and entire villages massacred, the media took little time to launch a campaign «who kills

[14] Over the past two years, since the 'repented' or 'pardoned' Islamists returned home, numerous reports came out in the independent Algerian press regarding shopkeepers harassed, threatened and scared for having had a radio playing in their shop; young women being publicly threatened for being outside their homes without a male guardian. 'Repented' Islamist armed groups are making clear allusions to the fact that fundamentalists will come back to power and that they will punish all those who fail to abide by their rules now.

[15] Over the past month, President Bouteflika alluded in several of his public speeches to the fact that women should dress in a way that would not 'provoke the Islamists', should not smoke in public, etc.

[16] On the alliance between President Bouteflika and the FIS, see the titles of *Le Matin* n°2858, Thursday July 19, 2001 on p 1: 'THEY are back!: the islamist leaders reinvest the scene', 'The islamist army of Bouteflika'; And on p 2 and 3: 'The islamists gain ground', Bouteflika or the rise of FIS', 'They have shared the terrain'. In *Le Matin* n°2851, July 11, 2001 Front page: 'Who wants the coming back of FIS?' In *Le Matin* n°2852, July 12, 2001, Front page: 'Bouteflika-FIS: the plot is getting more precise', and a full page on p 5 'The Fis of the government and the other FIS (The ex-FIS officially banned, is being rehabilitated subreptically without any reaction from the institutions of the state and without the public opinion being informed)'.
* FIS: Islamic Salvation Front AIS: Islamic Salvation Army GIA: Islamic Armed Groups

who?» in order to inculcate doubts about the actual responsibility of the Islamists in these crimes, - despite those being announced by their own identifiable «communiqués», then implemented and subsequently claimed by the armed groups?

This campaign aimed at charging the Algerian state with the crimes committed by the Islamists and making the latter appear as victims of the state, not as violators. Why? : The study ordered by the Rand Corporation and written by Graham Fuller a few years ago, crudely states that the USA needs above all to protect their interests in the Algerian Oil, and that a FIS government will preserve those best. The failure to recognize that Algeria is facing a life or death struggle for or against fascism seems hard to believe, if one does not also remember that similar blindness was prevailing when the mujahidin - later the Taliban were gaining power in Afghanistan. The same blindness and desire for conciliation unfortunately applied to the rise of Hitler. The myth of « moderate Islamists » needing to be given legal recognition in order to bring peace in Algeria cannot survive the ordinary fascism of the pogroms in Hassi Messaoud. We are still to hear any official protest from the fundamentalist parties and their clear statement on the rights of women to earn a livelihood for themselves and their families wherever they find a job in their own country, as well as their right to live without a male guardian.

It is the responsibility of the fascist Islamist project on the Algerian society when brain washed mobs believe that they have the right and duty to be the judges and executioners of working women. Their 'opinion' on the place and role of women in society is in total opposition to international law and humanitarian law, and thus cannot be protected as 'freedom of speech'. It is the 'freedom of speech' of the Imam of Hassi Messaoud that immediately provoked the pogrom.

We call on the anti fascists forces in the world to oppose the fascist project in Algeria. We call on them to make a clear cut difference between, on the one hand, the need to protect human rights of all citizens -including the human rights of the fascists and of their victims as well - and the clear and final opposition with which their project of society and their political program needs to be met.

A group of concerned Algerian democrats is presently planning to launch an International Tribunal on Fascist Fundamentalism that will also point at the international linkages of fundamentalist groups from one country to the other - and the implication of European states and the USA in the backing of fundamentalist armed groups.

Kosovo War, Feminists and Fascism in Serbia

*Zarana Papic**

[Belgrade, May 20th-August 5th, 1999]

Kosovo crisis is at the heart of the decade long war drama of the late country that used to be called Yugoslavia. The symbolic sign of the scope of immensely shallow (mis)understanding of the dead country's destiny is (for those of us who still remember) today painfully visible in CNN headlines: "War in Yugoslavia".

What "Yugoslavia" the world is talking about today? The trick with people's memory and amnesia is maybe unintentional, but it's no less misleading. The "Yugoslavia" CNN is talking about today is exactly the "phantom Yugoslavia" Milosevic would like us to take it for granted as being still alive and kicking. "Yugoslavia" does not exist any more. Serbia and Montenegro proclaimed themselves as Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, but have never been recognized by UN. Milosevic's Serbo-centric claim to be the only rightful "inheritor" of the former Yugoslavia is yet unfulfilled, as its seat in the UN is still empty.

Even more, the Kosovo war is not at all the war of this self-proclaimed Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but exclusively the war of Milosevic's Serbia. Montenegro is, in an ironic sense, a double collateral civilian victim: by Milosevic's power-system that persists in keeping her puppet-republic status, and by NATO that is bombing Milosevic-controlled military forces in Montenegro.

The series of wars in former Yugoslavia practically started when Milosevic, upon his Stalinist style taking over state-power by taking over Serbian Communist Party in 1987, decided to build up his power-system on machiavellian mutation dynamics of the communist totalitarian principle of "class struggle" into the even more lethal principle of "ethnic struggle", and it based on one basic social reality-and-power-production force: feed the

* (Women's Studies Center Belgrade)

antagonisms among people - endless series of antagonisms among Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians: cultural, historical, ethnic, national and racist antagonisms. And, at the same time, claim shamelessly to be the only "true" defender of the "Yugoslavian Idea". It represents itself as non-ideology - as the « natural order of things », a basic/true reality prior to any social act of representation. Its ideological content is well hidden, since it is not represented as the « battle of ideas », but instead, ideas became Blood, Skin, Genes, etc. The ideology of the Nation's Pre-Sociability produces, therefore, even more totalitarian Regime of the Body: exclusionary politics leads to annihilation of the Other: war, displacement, destruction and death of the Other Body

Furthermore, the principle of "ethnic struggle" is based on politically and culturally constructed racist antagonism. Yes, racist first, because "race/ethnicity/nationality" today is, in fact, a political category - an instrument of the "definitive Other" with whom life together is no longer possible. That's the reason why the Kosovo crisis is at the heart of the decade long drama of the late country called Yugoslavia. The destiny of former Yugoslavia was directed towards series of wars when Milosevic started to feed and orient the hatred of Serbians against Albanians as "legitimate" feelings and even as "basic" part of Serbian national identity. When this big, undeniable (as Serbs and Albanians are not of the same "race") hatred was unleashed, the series of "minor" hatreds were imminent, and wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were made possible. Now, the circle of crime came to its starting point. The series of wars in former Yugoslavia is a series of culturally, politically and military produced hatreds. Milosevic's power-system is based on producing, transforming and handling hatreds to its own ends. Among men, above all. More precisely, wars in former Yugoslavia are a series of ill fated, unsuccessful and deadly revengeful "broken brotherhoods". Tito's Yugoslavia laid all its hopes in multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional federation's vitality on one exclusive identity/difference, male dominated, principle: under the slogan "Brotherhood and Unity".

After more than a decade of "brotherly killings and dis-unifications", today is more than obvious that former Yugoslav "brothers" were the easiest decoy and the most effective tool of destructive politics of "ethnic struggle". Encouraging pro-fascist Serbian nationalism, Milosevic (ab)used the Serb's "trauma" under Tito (and their tragic destiny during the World War II) and used it as the most lethal instrument against all other nations. Instead of slowly democratic process of disillusioning Serb's from the Shangri-La of ideological brotherhood and unity, and, especially, of their historical hegemonic position and dispersive location, their waking-up was more like from a "uncontrolled" cultural delirium tremens: since 1987 Serbs didn't know exactly who they are but were absolutely ready to find that out through hating others, or being coldly indifferent to their destiny. The last decade (and even earlier) in Serbia could be defined as specific historical

processuality, as the “transition” from the pro-Yugoslav communism into the politically autistic, aggressive, pro-fascist collectivism.

That’s the reason why, among other things, there have never been significant democratic alternatives to Milosevic’s war-politics based on “ethnic struggle” against all. Even the so-called oppositional “men-leaders” could not help themselves and took part, each to his abilities, in this “I-don’t-mind-if-you-are-cleansed” game. The only political subjects in Serbia who dared to challenge this deadly game, since the beginning of wars in 1991, were some (now very much marginalised) women politicians and some feminist and pacifist groups. Belgrade’s Women in Black were the only ones who, ever since 1991, raised their voice against the new culture of normality - of ignoring, exteriorising, vanishing and hateful eliminating the Others. They were the only ones who cared enough and desperately opposed the masculinist hate-politics of former “brothers” saying: “Bosnian, Albanian, Roma women are our sisters”.

Now, as the series of wars since 1991 came to Kosovo as its proper “birth place”, the pro-fascist collectivization of Serbians under NATO bombs became an overall phenomenon, reaching in its scope further than ever, even among the previously declared democrats, anti-nationalists or pacifists, and therefore, made indifference to the destruction of the Other the most dominant political, cultural, public and private, fact of reality of today’s Serbia. The “happy-to-persecute-traitors” new marshal law, promptly introduced to make sure that fear will be thoroughly interiorised and will paralyze any significant resistance to the final act of fascisation of the whole public/private world in Serbia, the media legitimated denial of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, and the explicit “taboo” on, even silent remembering, not to say speaking out loud, that Albanians, rightful citizens of F.R.Y, were being brutally cleansed from Kosovo, and the seductive Serbian narcissism over being (finally) a victim of NATO bombings, shows ever so clearly the real face of all previous wars, of Kosovo war, and of what politically and historically became Serbia today. The stages in the long process of fascisation of symbolic and material social world in Milosevic’s Serbia could be defined as series of multiple structural mutations: from state socialism to state nationalism; from state nationalism to mafia etatism, from mafia etatism to oriental despotism; from oriental despotism to fascisized tyranny. Inevitably, these processes were heavily situated on four identity levels: self-identity, civic/urban identity, gender identity and the identity of the Other. All four identity levels were under extreme turmoil, under systematically violent and (only seemingly) chaotic and uncontrolled barbarization of inner/outer, public/private cultural patterns.

This systematic production of “inevitable barbarity” shows to what extent the wars in ex-Yugoslavia were a result systematic symbolic production of violent representations/narrations before and during the factual violence. The social world in Serbia was systematically constructed

as the discourse of excluding the Otherness: the exteriorization of the Other, the erasure of empathy, the denial of tolerance, the amnesia of history of living together. In order to be effective, this over-all practice of negation of the Otherness, and consequently, the tolerated destruction of the Other Body had to be prepared through a systematic (discursive, symbolic, iconic, etc) cultural production of various levels of reality upon which the consensus on fascist politics would arise as specific "culture of normality". In Serbia, some of the very effective features of this fascist culture of normality were legitimated through dominant political/cultural discourse ever since 1988: a) all Others are denominated as "impossible": suspicious, treacherous, conspirative against the "Serbianhood", or as the very negation of humanity, an unworthy animal, automatic&obedient collective agent, etc. b) the social world went through a systematic transgression of "civilized" taboos and their radical inversion (media produced) into taboos against the Otherness - against peace and tolerance, against contacts with the Other Body, against empathy, cross-connections, multi-ethnic friendships; mixed neighborhood, inter-ethnic marriages, individual emotions, etc. c) the depersonalization of the social life: the violent collectivity of the Nation, territory, origin, tradition, culture, etc. d) women as the unrepresentative Other in one's own nation, and the representative Other and the target of violence of the enemy nation (the over-sexualisation of the other nation; the emasculation of the "warrior's" male body as obedient servant, etc.

To what extent the pro-fascist cultural, political and psychological (public and private) *etat d'esprit* has been dominant in the political life of Serbia for more than the decade, shows the small document, entitled "I Confess" and made by Belgrade's Women in Black in October 1998, on the occasion of the 7th year of their anti-war activity:

Women in Black Against War, Belgrade

7 years of women in black, We Are Still On The Streets 9 October 1991
- 9 October 1998

I confess:

- to my longtime anti-war activity;
- that I did not agree with the severe beating of people of other ethnicities and nationalities, faiths, race, sexual orientation; - that I was not present at the ceremonial act of throwing flowers on the tanks headed for Vukovar, 1991 and Prishtina, 1998; - that I opposed the politics of repression, apartheid, massacres and war of Serbian regime against Albanian population on Kosovo; - that I fed women and children in refugee camps, schools, churches, mosques;
- that for the entire war I crossed the walls of Balkan ethno-states, because solidarity is the politics that interests me; - that I understood

democracy as support to anti-war activists/friends/sisters: Albanian women, Croat women, Roma women, stateless women;

- that I first challenged the murderers from the state where I live and then those from other states, because I consider this to be responsible political behavior of a woman-citizen;

- that throughout all the seasons of the year I insisted that there be an end to the slaughter, destruction, ethnic cleansing, forced evacuation of people, rape;

- that I took care of others while the patriots took care of themselves. On 9 October 1998 at 6:30 p.m. on Republic Square we will make visible our non-violent resistance to war

We Are All Women In Black!

Women in Black

Belgrade

This singular document in the form of extraordinary political public/private narration testifies to the complex interplay of the continuity of the violent culture against Otherness in Serbia, and the urgency for exceptional ethical mobilization of the individuals and political subjects. The exclusivity of this document lies in its "discursive loneliness". It is one of the rare public statements that so strongly oppose the culture of exclusion. Moreover, this document transparently shows that the dominant taboo in the political/social life in Serbia is for years the taboo on respecting the Other: the "virtue" is exclusion, and the "crime" is inclusion of the Other.

It's discursive loneliness shows the hidden effects of tolerated violence against the Other, and point out to the invisibility of the destruction of the personal and social fabric in Serbia. Therefore, the expression "I Confess" in the Women in Black's document marks the fundamental inversion of dominant pro-fascist social codes, and at the same time, the articulation of the political sensibility which demands individual responsibility and public counter action. It shows how the basic intertwining of personal and political/historical in traumatic times could become an articulate feminist political action, although very marginal, but with powerful symbolic potential. It makes us aware that in the times when the culture of violence and exclusion becomes the "legitimate narration" there is exceptional need for the ethical mobilization of the subject, for the continuous self-reflection and self-narration. The other document, made by Belgrade's Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence during the NATO bombing of F.R.Y, is another example of feminist resistance to the internal fascistisation processes in: against the "new" oblivion of the Other and indifference to the fate of Kosovo's Albanians, the "narcissistic homogenization" of many Serbs under NATO bombs, the denial of the organized crime against

Kosovo's Albanians before and during the NATO bombing, and the final domination of the vandalist culture aggressive towards anything that is taken as foreign, western, un-Orthodox, non-Serb, mixed, civil, civilian, etc. But, above all, this document is not only a testimony of political and psychological effects of the NATO bombing, but evenmore a testimony of the reality under martial law promptly introduced the day when the bombing started, as the structural state's violence aimed to paralyze every possible resistance to its politics of ethnic cleansing. Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence Belgrade

Activity Report During the War Time

(from 25 of March - 24th of April 1999)

Active Support in Overcoming fear of Women After the first night of bombing, 24th of March the law of war was ordered. Fear became the fact of life overnight... the activists of Women's Center decided to start calling women over the phone to ask them how are they, to give them space for overcoming fears. Until this moment, already six years, the work of Autonomous Women's Center was based on ethical principle that implies that the service is give to women when they ask for it, when they call or come to the Center. The fear in the wartime has moved the borders of private and public and therefore we transgressed the principles of work. Every women became a possible client, at least for a moment. Connecting with each other, calling on the phone, asking women how do they feel... became legitimate activities of the Women's Center. Once again, the women's solidarity inspired many women. That is how we started the active telephone support for women in overcoming fear. Active Phone Counseling

counseling phone work is based on the feminist principles of psychological counseling as well as on the experiences in working with women in fear in the war in Bosnia from the therapists in the Women's Therapy Center Medica Zenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Fear Counseling Team decided on active calling women for different reasons. First because in the war situations women are less mobile and do not leave their homes often. Second, they feel their homes as the only safe place, most of the times, then, the telephone bill is paid by the Women's Center, which is a very important factor in the times of war when the poverty is increasing and women cannot relax to talk about themselves if they know they cannot pay the bill.

Documenting the Feelings of Fear

Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence, from its foundation in 1993, believes in the anti-war anti-military politics, in multi-nationality as well as in spreading solidarity with women from the other side of the front line. In the present situation Women's Center is documenting feelings of women who are in fear of NATO bombing and entire war situation, as well as feelings of women in Priština and other parts

from Kosovo that are going through particular processes of fear, terror and pain. Documenting calls in the first 25 working days, five counselors gave 378 telephone counseling to women from 34 towns in SR Yugoslavia. Statistics of Women's Center show that 232 counseling phone sessions were done with women in Belgrade and others from women in other towns including regions Vojvodina, Sandzak, Montenegro and Kosovo. From all the calls, 87% of calls were initiated in the Center.

Documenting Statements of Fear

The Women's Center is documenting all types of fears and forms in which fear is manifested.. in body, in dreams, in behavior, in thoughts... From the statements it is easy to conclude that life of every women has changed, that emotional states are changing very often during a day, that emotions that are most dominant is the desperation and anxiety as well as tendency to survive and to adapt to the limited conditions of life.

"I am in a horrible fear" "I fear the night" "I am afraid to go out further than the grocery shop" " I don't go out" " I sleep in the house of my friend" " I cannot concentrate" "I am sensitive on all the sounds" "I have fear of mobilization for my brother" "when sirens starts I feel nauseatic" "I have lost 4 kilos, I broke down psychologically" " every night I go to the shelter, I feel bad" "when I see soldiers on the street I shudder" "I feel I dropped out from the tracks, everything changed in my life" "I am worried for my future" "I am constantly on the sleeping pills" "I sleep all dressed up" "children in the shelter are very disturbed" "On my work place men started to drink intensively" "I am nervous" "I am not afraid of death but I am afraid of sudden sounds" "It is killing me that I cannot work anything any more" "My emotional state is changing every hour" "I threw out the TV set, I cannot listen to that language anymore" "neighbors are talking apocalyptic gossips all the time" "I am nervous, I go from the shelter to the flat three times in one night" "I feel like leaving this country forever, it is so nauseate" "new fears are coming"

Documenting Statements About Mechanisms Of Survival Active role of the Fear Counseling Team of the Women's Center is to support mechanisms of survival in women and their positive experiences. Supporting healthy dimensions of behavior, feelings and thoughts is the main form of the active support of women. "I am feeling good, I have gone through one war already, I know the rules" "I am concentrated and rational I have enough information" "I feel good, I am supporting other women" "I am cleaning the house all day" "I am walking up and down the town all day" "I spend hours on e-mail" "I have planted many plants" "I am taking my children to the hills" "We are hugging all day" "I am taking sleeping pills, and it works for me"

Documenting Statements Of Women Of Albanian Nationality In Kosovo

The Fear Counseling Team has been calling women and activists in Pristina and on Kosovo actively first two weeks after the beginning of the NATO bombing. The Women of Serbian nationality have stated their fears of bombing, the women of Albanian nationality apart from fears of bombing had much stronger fears of Serbian officials, army and police ("of green, blue and masked men"). After first two weeks many women of Albanian nationality have been forced to leave their homes, as they said, in front of the soldiers who had Machine-guns and spoke Serbian language. After that, with their families they were forced to go to the buses of trains that took them close to the Macedonian border. From Macedonia some of them have called us to tell us that they are alive and healthy and from some of them we heard parts of the humiliation stories and terror they had to go through in the meantime.

"I am terrorized" "strange silence is horrifying me" "we are sitting in the dark every night, I cannot sleep nor eat, but I have coffee and cigarettes" "we don't get out of homes at all, not even during the day" "I don't know what to tell you nor what to think, I am still alive"

Workshops About Feelings

In the first month the Women's center has organized four workshops with the title How do we feel. The exchange of negative and positive experience have been of paramount importance for participants to feel they are not alone in their fears and to be supported for their positive feelings.

Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence continues the active telephone support of women and will continue to issue reports and analysis of data obtained.

The Fear Counseling Team:

Biljana Maletin, Bobana Macanovic, Bosiljka Janjusevic, Lepa Mladjenovic, Sandra Tvitic autonomous women's center against sexual violence Belgrade, tel/fax: 381.11.687.190

These examples of feminist political resistance to the inner processes of fascisation of the political life and minds of people, shows to what great extent the "normality" of excluding and eliminating the Other has become the dominant pattern, even the specific normative standard of public and private life in Serbia. During the 77 days of NATO bombing in Serbia we were witnessing and going through a new experience of "state of war", which aimed to make each of us individuals interiorize the fear of state's violence and paralyze us in every cell of our bodies. It was the experience of the organized oppression in which violence and fear are so strongly intertwined in many directions, defragmentising and affecting every level of

our realities, an atmosphere of the instrumentalist threat of overall terror forcing us towards one very precise goal: auto-fixation only on "our" victimization by NATO bombing. The martial law in Serbia as its primary aims had the paralization of the political resistance, fascisation of "ordinary" people, among them even some 'democrats', and cleansing Albanians from Kosovo.

The two months of the state of war in Serbia could be, therefore defined more accurately as the state of fascism. Fascism is, in fact, a very active process, a co-operation constantly invoked for the normalization of its codes, an untransparent but powerful demand for each and every individual, for each and every political subject, to share its norms up to the point of no return when consensus/silence of the annihilation of the Other is reached, and the collaboration becomes "forcefully voluntary" (forcement volontaire).

* (Women's Studies Center Belgrade)

Words of Flora Brovina during her Trial in Nis, Serbia

9 of December '99

On 21st January 2000, Rajko Danilovic, Flora Brovina's defence lawyer, filed an appeal against his client's twelve-year sentence. The appeal hearing was scheduled for 16th May 2000. The appeal called for the Supreme Court to either acquit Mrs. Brovina, or to release her on bail pending a retrial. Grounds for the retrial include violations of the due process during the trial hearings including a breach of the Serbian Code of Civil Procedure. On 7th June 2000 the Serbian Supreme Court has overturned the conviction of Mrs. Flora Brovina and returned the case for review by the Nis District Court. The Supreme Court has recommended that she be released on bail.

The decision of the Supreme Court was the result of an appeal hearing that had taken place on 16th May 2000. Although a further decision is likely to be some time, it has been noted that the options for the Nis District Court are to either dismiss the case and order her immediate release, or to order a re-trial.

On this trial Flora Brovina, a poet and a medical doctor and a leader of the Albanian Womens League from Pristina, Kosova, was sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment by Serbian authority for the delict of "organizing enemy and terrorist activities in the times of Martial law".

Present on the trial were some human rights activists among whom Stasa Zajovic, Women in Black, Radmila Lazic, poet, Natasa Kandic, Humanitarian Law Fund all from Belgrade.

This is her final word:

"I dedicated my whole life to children and children do not choose their ethnicity, children do not know what ethnicity they are if their parents do not tell them. With my patients, I have never divided them according to their ethnicity, according to religion or the ideological choice of their parents. I feel proud because of this and even if I was not an Albanian I

would have done the same thing. I am one of the persons most involved in humanitarian work in Kosovo; I have sacrificed my health in order to help women and children. If I were free, I would have had much work, I would help those that are suffering more now; now it is not Albanians that are suffering the most in Kosova, now it is others, and I would work with all my strength in order to help them, Serb, Roma people.

My duty has been to dedicate myself also as a woman, as a doctor, as a poet to the emancipation of the Albanian woman, to her consciousness, to women's human rights, to help them fight for their freedom, to understand that without independence economics cannot succeed nor can freedom. In the League for Albanian Women, I have created bridges of friendship in the country and in the whole world. We have cooperated the most with Serbian women. Serbian women have given me the strongest support, perhaps they knew our problems best, and they have presented our problems best. The Albanian women of Kosovo should never forget this.

I am very sorry that the court underestimates the role of women in the world. It is very important that women enjoy the same equality as men. I will never renounce the right to fight for the rights of women. I will always fight for women's rights.

What the court has accused me of having fought for the secession of Kosovo and the annexation of Albania, I repeat: My country is where my friends are and where my poems are read. My poems are read in Switzerland, India, Brazil, Poland, in each of these countries it is as if I am in their own house. My poems have been published in the Encyclopedia of Poets of Yugoslavia (ex-Yugoslavia) and it is something very important for Albanian women.

The Albanian community has never behaved in this manner with their neighbors, women, and children. Right now in Kosovo, they have gone back to revenge at the end of the twentieth century. I am very sorry for not being free, for being in jail, for not being able to influence more what is happening now in Kosovo, for not being able to do more to lend a hand, to help those that are expelled, displaced. I believe that they will do it as if I were with them; I hope that they will make it because they are women, I hope that they behave in a just manner. I would do anything for them so that they could return to their houses, I would do anything so that the Serbian community and the Albanians reconcile. The intellectuals of Kosovo should give their support to reconciliation, other communities have also fought, they have made even larger wars between each other and now they have reconciled."

Flora left the court walking slowly; the police showed with harsh and arrogant words to the family and friends of Flora that they were not permitted to have any contact with her. Flora's two sisters that arrived from Kosovo, the poet Radmila Lazic, and I went to accompany Flora up to the

police car. For a moment, we succeeded in putting the palms of our hands on the window of the police car. At that moment one of the policemen said with an insolent voice, "She's in safe hands. . ." Two policemen were in the front seat of the vehicle. Before my eyes surged imprisoned women: Leyla Zana, Kurdish, imprisoned in Turkey, Rigoberta Menchu, Aung Suun Ki. . . We waved goodbye to Flora until the police vehicle was gone, while we could see it. I was in a state of "black shame," as Ana Ahmatova says, because each one of us could have been on her place.

Resource Index

Legal Notes

Declarations and Statements

Newsbriefs

Organisations

Books and Papers

Periodicals

Audiovisuals

Legal Notes

<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/ld199899/ldjudgmt/jd990325/islam01.htm>

House of Lords Session 1998-99

Judgments - Islam (A.P.) v. Secretary of State for the Home Department

Regina v. Immigration Appeal Tribunal and Another Ex Parte Shah (A.P.) (Conjoined Appeals)

House of Lords

Lord Steyn

Lord Hoffmann

Lord Hope of Craighead

Lord Hutton

Lord Millett

Opinions of the Lords of Appeal for Judgment in the Cause

Islam (A.P.) (Appellant)

v.

Secretary of State for the Home Department (Respondent)

Regina

v.

Immigration Appeal Tribunal and Another (Respondents)

Ex Parte Shah (A.P.)

(Conjoined Appeals)

on 25 March 1999

Lord Steyn

My Lords,

The two appeals before the House raise important questions about the interpretation of article 1A(2) of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951, and in particular the meaning of the words "membership of a particular social group." Section 8(2) of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, provides that a person who has limited leave to enter the United Kingdom may appeal to a special adjudicator against a refusal to vary leave

"on the ground that it would be contrary to the United Kingdom's obligations under the Convention for him to be required to leave the United Kingdom after the time limited by the leave." The common features of the two appeals are as follows. Both appeals involve married Pakistani women, who were forced by their husbands to leave their homes. They are at risk of being falsely accused of adultery in Pakistan. They are presently in England. They seek asylum in this country as refugees. They contend that, if they are forced to return to Pakistan, they would be unprotected by the state and would be subject to a risk of criminal proceedings for sexual immorality. If found guilty the punishment may be flogging or stoning to death. In these circumstances both women claim refugee status on a ground specified in article 1A(2) of the Convention, namely that they have a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of "membership of a particular social group." The Court of Appeal rejected these claims: *Reg. v. Immigration Appeal Tribunal, Ex-parte Shah* [1998] 1 W.L.R. 74. Both women have been granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom. But both women still seek refugee status. The principal question of law is whether the appellants are members of a particular social group within the meaning of article 1A(2) of the Convention. This question can only be considered against a close and particular focus on the facts of the case.

Women in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Generalisations about the position of women in particular countries are out of place in regard to issues of refugee status. Everything depends on the evidence and findings of fact in the particular case. On the findings of fact and unchallenged evidence in the present case, the position of women in Pakistan is as follows. Notwithstanding a constitutional guarantee

against discrimination on the grounds of sex a woman's place in society in Pakistan is low. Domestic abuse of women and violence towards women is prevalent in Pakistan. That is also true of many other countries and by itself it does not give rise to a claim to refugee status. The distinctive feature of this case is that in Pakistan women are unprotected by the state: discrimination against women in Pakistan is partly tolerated by the state and partly sanctioned by the state. Married women are subordinate to the will of their husbands. There is strong discrimination against married women, who have been forced to leave the matrimonial home or have simply decided to leave. Husbands and others frequently bring charges of adultery against such wives. Faced with such a charge the woman is in a perilous position. Similarly, a woman who makes an accusation of rape is at great risk. Even Pakistan statute law discriminate against such women. The position is described in a report of Amnesty International dated 6 December 1995 on Women in Pakistan. The report states, at pp. 5-7:

“. . . several Pakistani laws explicitly discriminate against women. In some cases they allow only the evidence of men to be heard, not of women. In particular, the Evidence Act and the Zina Ordinance, one of four Hudood Ordinances promulgated in 1979, have eroded women's rights and denied them equal protection by the law.

Women are also disadvantaged generally in the criminal justice system because of their position in society. . . . Women are particularly liable to be punished under the Zina Ordinance which deals with extramarital sexual intercourse. . . . Offences under this law attract different punishments according to the evidence on which the conviction is based. In cases where the most severe (hadd) punishments may be imposed, the evidence of women is not admissible.

“In a rape case the onus of proof falls on the victim. If a woman fails to prove that she did not give her consent to intercourse,

the court may convict her of illicit sexual intercourse. . . .

“The majority of cases tried under the Hudood laws result in convictions carrying the less severe (ta'zir) punishments, but there are also some acquittals and a few convictions involving the most severe (hadd) punishments. . . .

“About half the women prisoners in Pakistan are held on charges of Zina; . . . Arrests under the Zina Ordinance can be made without a magistrate first investigating whether there is any basis for the charge and issuing a warrant. As a result, women in Pakistan are often held under the Zina Ordinance for years although no evidence has ever been produced that they have committed any offence. Men frequently bring charges against their former wives, their daughters or their sisters in order to prevent them marrying or remarrying against the man's wishes. . . .

“Most women remain in jail for two to three years before their cases are decided, often on the basis of no evidence of any offence.”

For what may be a small minority, who are convicted of sexual immorality, there is the spectre of 100 lashes in public or stoning to death in public. This brief description of the discrimination against women, which is tolerated and sanctioned by the state in Pakistan, is the defining factual framework of this case.

The Shah case

The appellant is 43. Her husband turned her out of the marital home in Pakistan. She arrived in the United Kingdom in 1992 and gave birth to a child shortly thereafter. In June 1993 she claimed asylum. She is afraid that her violent husband may accuse her of adultery and may assault her or denounce her under Sharia law for the offence of sexual immorality. In her case the evidence of state toleration and sanctioning of discrimination against women was sketchy.

This claim was rejected on the ground that the appellant does not come within “a

particular social group" under article 1A(2). The appellant appealed to the special adjudicator. On 25 July 1995 the special adjudicator found that the appellant's fear of persecution was well founded. But she concluded that the appellant does not fall within "a particular social group", being the only conceivable ground for her Convention claim. On 7 August 1995 the Immigration Appeal Tribunal refused leave to appeal on the ground "that the adjudicator gave clear adverse findings of fact, after giving to each element on the evidence the weight she considered appropriate." The appellant sought judicial review of the refusal of leave. The substantive hearing took place before Sedley J. (now Sedley L.J.). The Secretary of State conceded that the I.A.T. had misdirected itself but contended that relief should be denied because the claim to refugee status is as a matter of law unsustainable. Sedley J. held that the appellant's case is arguable. He granted an order directing the I.A.T. to grant leave and to hear and determine the appeal: *Reg. v. Immigration Appeal Tribunal and Secretary of State for the Home Department, Ex parte Shah* [1997] Imm.A.R. 145.

The Islam case

The appellant is 45 and has two children. She arrived with her children in the United Kingdom in 1991. In the same year she claimed asylum. She is a teacher. She married her husband in 1971. He was often violent towards her. But the marriage endured. In 1990 a fight broke out in the school where she was teaching. The fight was between young supporters of two rival political factions. She intervened. One faction became hostile towards her. They made allegations of infidelity against her. These allegations were made, inter alia, to her husband who was a supporter of the same faction. Her husband assaulted her and she was twice admitted to hospital. She left her husband. She stayed briefly at her brother's house. Unknown men threatened her brother. She could not remain with him. After a brief stay in a temporary refuge she came to the United Kingdom. In claiming

asylum she relied on two Convention grounds under article 1A(2), namely a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of (1) membership of a particular social group and (2) political opinion.

The claim was rejected. By a determination dated 7 December 1995 the special adjudicator accepted the evidence of the appellant. She found that the appellant had been persecuted in Pakistan. She also found that the authorities in Pakistan are both unable and unwilling to protect the appellant. But she held that as a matter of law the appellant was not a member of a "particular social group" because the group could not exist independently of the feared persecution. Moreover, she found that on the facts neither the particular political faction nor the appellant's husband persecuted her because of an actual or perceived political opinion. By a determination of 2 October 1996 the I.A.T. dismissed the appeal. The I.A.T. found that the appellant cannot be said to belong to a particular social group because the "sub-group does not . . . have any innate or unchangeable characteristic, nor is it a cohesive homogeneous group whose members are in close voluntary association." The I.A.T. further concluded that on the facts the appellant's persecution was motivated neither by an actual nor attributed political opinion.

Zimbabwe: Court Rules Women Are Not Adults for Family Law

Originally posted in IGC member conference: list.beijing95

Date: May 6, 1999

Posted by: beijing95-l@netcom.com

/* Written 12:46 PM May 6, 1999 by beijing95-l@netcom.com in list.beijing95 */

"[B95:] Zimbabwean Women Stripped o"

Subject: [B95:] Zimbabwean Women Stripped of Rights (fwd)

From: joan r saks berman
<jberman@unm.edu>

Two disturbing messages about the Zimbabwean Supreme Court's decision to strip women of their equal rights under Zimbabwean law.

Dear PAR-leuses,

A quiet but unanimous decision of the Zimbabwe Supreme Court last month said that "the nature of African society" dictates that women are not equal to men. According to cultural norms, the Court said, women "should never be considered adults within the family, but only as a junior male, or teen-ager".

Welshman Ncube, the nation's leading constitutional scholar, said:

"Basically, there's nothing left of the gains women's rights have made in the past 20 years. It's a full-bench decision, 5-0, by the Supreme Court. There is no appeal. They meant to settle this question once and for all."

The case that sparked the decision involved 58 year old seamstress Vennia Magaya, who sued her half-brother for her portion of her father's estate after the brother threw her out of the house.

According to Zimbabwe's laws and constitution, she had a clear claim as heir to the estate. The laws have now been erased.

A Knight-Ridder news item that broke the story also quotes a Zimbabwean columnist, living in the U.S., who apparently typifies Zimbabwean men's attitude to women. He recently ridiculed gender relations in the U.S. and wrote that equal rights for women have resulted in huge numbers of "sissified men" who are turning to homosexuality because women are frustrating their "natural desires".

PAR-leuses may recognize the poisonous influence of Zimbabwe's president (despot), Robert Mugabe, who has railed against homosexuality, free speech and feminism. Zimbabwe is reportedly sliding into economic ruin and political chaos under

this corrupt regime, which has wasted millions on sending troops to fight for Lawrence Kabila in Congo.

Michele Landsberg

Date: Mon, 19 Apr 1999 08:37:17 -0400

From: Women Leaders Online
<wlo@WLO.ORG>

Subject: WOC Alert 4/18/99 - Zimbabwe Women Stripped of All Rights

WOC Alert 4/18/99 - Zimbabwe Women Stripped of All Rights;

- TODTW This Thursday; PBS Leads Backlash When Zimbabwe broke free of colonial rule 20 years ago, the country recognized the work of women in the long drive for freedom by guaranteeing women equality under the new law. The nation's constitution, a separate law enforcing women's rights and several international human rights treaties all served to provide a basis for outlawing discrimination on the basis of gender. The country thus moved forward as an independent egalitarian nation.

But recently, equality for women came to a halt in Zimbabwe. The nation's Supreme Court just reversed all the laws protecting women, ruling that "the nature of African society" dictates that women are not equal to men, especially in family relationships. The court, by a 5-0 decision, said centuries-old African cultural norms, which are not written down, say women should never be considered adults within the family, but only as a "junior male."

There is no appeal for this think. For it is the triumph for conservatives in Africa who have urged that the clock be turned back to pre-colonial days.

could not own land, inherit property from their deceased husbands or fathers, choose their own wedding arrangements or have any rights to their children in the case of divorce.

Their husbands could practice polygamy as they wished. While Zimbabwe's actions run

counter to much of what is happening in Africa - a woman in Kenya recently became the first to sue her husband for domestic abuse, and female genital mutilation was outlawed in West Africa, for example - the Zimbabwe action gives hope to reactionaries everywhere. Under the guise of "family values," women will be forced to enter the 21st Century with the same rights they had in the 19th Century. ACTION: Tourism is a major industry in Zimbabwe.

Let the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority know that you are unwilling to visit a nation which turns its back on promises made to more than half the population. You can write to or call (sorry, no email readily available) the Authority at: Zimbabwe Tourism Office Rockefeller Centre Suite 1905 1270 Avenue of the Americas New York N.Y. 10020 United States of America Tel: 212-332-1090 Fax: 212-332-1093

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Declarations and Statements

8th March 2000

International Day of Actions for Women's Rights

Women in Black against Fascism

The women's movement traditionally marks 8th March by actions organized out in the streets. Women in Black, feminists and pacifists have held manifestations on the squares of Belgrade for ten years now.

This year we wish to say that fascism has become part of our everyday lives and a method of survival for many. Getting accustomed to violence is also fascism.

Fascism takes a thousand disguises from our kitchen to our bedrooms because we are being taught that it is we who are always a bit better than the others.

We use the term fascism because:

It makes us indifferent to everything violence, the suffering of others, aggression, massacres, destroyed houses, death That indifference is fascism.

- Because we settle for a constructed reality and irresponsibility fearing rejection and isolation. That too is fascism.
- Because violence has become part of our everyday lives ^ children are beaten because they are different, the media are being suffocated because of what they see and hear. All those whose opinions are different are beaten or imprisoned. " The important thing is that the Party has survived, we can substitute the people."

- Because life has become irrelevant: that is why our salaries are 74 DM, our schools are cold and our teachers are hungry, city transport is insufficient and so are medicaments, sugar, oil and milk, that is why people are ill and are simply dying.
- We Women in Black, have decided to:
- Be sensitive to the slightest crime in our surroundings. We refuse to take the role of victims and the divisions into "us" and "them".
- Never forget Others, because we believe that the experience of Others is as important as our own.
- Speak up about repression, war, poverty, compulsive conscription, non-existent bridges, burning villages because silence will not bring salvation.
- Be disobedient to the state, to our father or husband, because we believe that there is an anti-fascist in every one of us.
- Take responsibility for hope because we label fascism, we are aware of it, we are not intimidated and we oppose it by big and small actions of disobedience daily.
- Solidarity with the different is the policy we advocate
- On Wednesday, 8th March 2000, we will hold a vigil on Republic Square from 15:30 till 16:30. Join us there!

Belgrade, 7th March 2000

Women in Black

Newsbriefs

Afghanistan: **Thousands of civilians massacred by Taliban: Amnesty**

June 16, 1999

- LONDON, June 16 (AFP) - Afghanistan's Taliban massacred thousands of civilians, tortured thousands more and made women prisoners in their own homes in 1998, Amnesty International said Wednesday in its annual review.

- The human rights groups said after the Islamic militia took Mazar-e-Sharif in the north of the country from opposition forces, "Taliban guards deliberately and systematically killed thousands of ethnic Hazara civilians".

- "They were killed in their homes or on the streets, or executed. Women, children and the elderly were shot while trying to flee the city."

- The report added one group of prisoners was executed in front of villagers near Hairatan, 70 other men had their throats slit in Mazar-i-Sharif and more than 100 people suffocated inside metal containers transporting them from the city to Sherbarghan.

- "Thousands of people were killed; thousands of others remained missing," it said. Over the year, the dead included two United Nations workers and a UN captain.

- Thousands of people were also killed "deliberately and arbitrarily" by different warring factions, according to the report. And more than 1,000 civilians were reportedly victims of landmines.

- Amnesty also detailed the detention and killing of all ethnic groups other than Pashtun.

- Thousands of Hazara, Tajik, Uzbek and Panjsheri men and boys were detained, said the report.

- "Almost all prisoners detained on suspicion of opposing the Taliban were reported to have been tortured or ill-treated," said Amnesty.

- In addition, said Amnesty, the Taliban's ultra-strict interpretation of Moslem Sharia law prompted widespread human rights violations.

- Included among hundreds detained and ill-treated for defying Taliban edicts were "men not attending congregational prayers, those trimming facial hair, taxi drivers carrying women passengers and tailors making women's clothes".

- "Executions and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments were believed to be widespread," said Amnesty.

- "Of those announced, eight people were flogged, including a woman accused of adultery who was given 100 lashes at the Kabul Sports Stadium in February in front of some 30,000 spectators."

- The group also catalogued 14 public amputations and 10 public executions, including five men convicted for sodomy who were crushed to death by a wall, sometimes pushed by their own families.

- On women, Amnesty said: "Tens of thousands of women effectively remained prisoners in their own homes.

- "Fears of punishment prevented tens of thousands of women from seeking education and employment or leaving home without a close male relative.

- "Many of those accused of defying the edicts were taken to detention centres where they were humiliated or beaten by officials of the Department for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice."

- Finally, said Amnesty, with neighbouring countries supplying weapons to their favoured factions, “the prospects for peace remained remote”.

Afghanistan: Afghanistan’s Taliban : Going Beyond Its Islamic Upbringing

by Kenneth J. Cooper

Foreign Journal [03/09/1998]

The Washington Post | FINAL | Page A14

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In the past century, an influential Islamic seminary in this northern Indian town has churned out more than 300,000 edicts based on Muslim law, covering matters ranging from the proper regulation of mosques to personal disputes between spouses.

Every month in recent years, six clerics at the Deoband seminary have promulgated 200 edicts, or fatwas, which carry the weight of religious law for millions of Muslims on the Indian subcontinent. But despite that voluminous production, the seminary’s chief interpreter of Islamic law had never heard of several fatwas in effect in one part of the region.

Is there anything in Islam that forbids women from wearing white socks?

“Nothing,” said Mohammad Zafeeruddin, Deoband’s chief mufti.

Must Muslims paint street-level windows in their homes black? “This is not according to Islamic law,” he replied. “Whether it is black or any color depends on personal choice.”

Does Islam ban kite flying? “There is no harm as long as it does not disturb your daily” prayers, said Zafeeruddin, looking more and more bemused by a foreign visitor’s questions.

“Who is issuing these fatwas?” interjected Adil Siddiqui, a retired bureaucrat in charge of the seminary’s public relations.

They were issued by the Taliban , a militant Islamic militia that has seized control of more than two-thirds of Afghanistan in the past four years. The Taliban , whose leaders have imposed what may be the world’s most radical interpretation of Islam on areas under their control, trace the group’s theological roots to the seminary here in predominantly Hindu India. Many members of the Taliban were schooled in Pakistani seminaries based on the Deoband model.

“Of course, the Deoband seminary is a source of inspiration and guidance for us,” said Naim Jan, political adviser to Mohammad Omar, the Taliban ’s leader. “For all of our teachers and scholars, the Deoband seminary is a theological source.”

But the Taliban has gone far beyond the multitudinous dictates of its theological source in zealously pursuing a stated goal of establishing a “100-percent Islamic government.” Its leaders say their aim is to be purer even than the government of Saudi Arabia, which administers Islam’s holiest shrines, imposes a similar brand of Islam and subsidizes the Taliban . Iran, whose 1978 revolution focused Western attention on Islamic fundamentalism, has branded the Taliban ’s version “medieval.”

The Taliban has issued more than 60 edicts regulating aspects of daily life — down to permissible dress and diversions — and has enforced the orders with thrashings. Bans on girls attending schools and most women working outside the home have stirred international condemnation, causing all but three nations to withhold diplomatic recognition and prompting some aid organizations to curb operations in one of the world’s poorest countries.

The word taliban signifies religious students and refers to the militia’s roots.

Pakistani intelligence sources acknowledge that the nation's main spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, sent agents to Islamic seminaries in border areas of Pakistan to motivate Afghan refugees to create a militia in 1994 and plunge into Afghanistan's civil war.

Those sources said that the spy agency promoted the Taliban movement and then assigned military advisers to its fighting units with the knowledge of U.S. officials, who did not object.

State Department officials distanced the United States from the Taliban after its fighters seized Kabul, hanged Afghanistan's former communist ruler, Najibullah, and imposed restrictions on women.

In addition to the extreme nature of some of its edicts, it is the Taliban's propensity for violence that distinguishes its version of Islam from that propagated by easygoing, smiling clerics at the Deoband seminary, about 600 miles southeast of Afghanistan.

On the seminary's neat, orderly campus, where 3,000 bearded students undergo from four to 12 years of Islamic education, the teachings sound decidedly similar to those followed by the Taliban. For example, the seminary urges Muslim women to wear a loose garment that covers their bodies from head to toe. But a Hindu woman who toured the campus wearing jeans, with her head and face uncovered, encountered little hostility. Any woman on Kabul's streets in similar dress would risk being thrashed by religious police.

Likewise, Deoband clerics and the Taliban agree on separate schools and workplaces to "protect" females from unwanted male attention. But the seminary has not gone as far as banning girls from school or women from work.

Rafiq Zakaria, an Islamic scholar in Bombay, said the principal difference between the school and the militia is that

"what the Taliban are doing is taking these practices and these tenets and imposing them. Deobandis never imposed them. They have preached them."

Jan, the adviser to the Taliban leader, said that difference is the legacy of the factional fighting that followed the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 after a decade-long military occupation. "There has to be a difference between the students who grew up in war and those who were raised in peace," he said. "In Afghanistan, the gun is a feature of daily life, while in India that's not the case."

Perhaps because of the militia's coercive tactics, the seminary's representatives have expressed mixed feelings about the Taliban, at times dissociating themselves from their theological kin.

"We do not know what they preach, what they do," said Marghub-ur-Rahman, the seminary's rector. "We are not concerned with the Taliban at all."

But Siddiqui, the public relations director, praised the Afghan militia for "in every respect . . . following the teachings of Islam" although he did take exception to several edicts. "Both these schools [of Islam] are quite near to each other, and they have affinity," he said.

Special correspondent Kamran Khan contributed to this article from Peshawar, Pakistan.

Contact: <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

CAPTION: Students review books of Islamic edicts at a mosque in Deoband, India, where the Taliban militia that rules in Afghanistan has theological roots.

Arab World:

The Economist, 30 November 1999

<http://www.economist.com/editorial/freeforall/current/ir4740.html>

INTERNATIONAL

A hundred years of fortitude Cairo

Arab women are pushed backwards, sideways and just occasionally forwards in their struggle for political and legal rights

KUWAIT'S parliament this week voted down the ruler's decree that would have granted women political rights. Luckily for Kuwait's women, the vote was lost not only because of strong Islamist opposition but also because members were annoyed with the government for trying to rule by decree. Parliament is expected to pass its own, similar law before long. But the weeks of fuss, in one of the few Arab countries with a vigorous legislature, underscore the enduring sensitivity of women's issues in Arab societies.

Since 1899, when Qasim Amin, an Egyptian writer, published a seminal treatise blaming his society's backwardness on its oppression of women, Arab women have advanced, a little. In liberal Tunisia, polygamy is banned, and women enjoy easy access to divorce and abortion. In Algeria and Iraq, women have long done well in professions such as the law, medicine and science. Even in the conservative Gulf, girls now receive three times the years of schooling that their mothers had.

Yet speakers at a recent conference in Cairo called "A Hundred Years of Arab Women's Liberation" found little to celebrate. "The title has nothing to do with reality," complained a Palestinian participant. Leaving aside extreme cases such as Saudi Arabia, where women are still forbidden to appear unveiled or to sit in a restaurant alone, even "progressive" countries have progressed little in the past 20 years.

Egypt, whose legal system and social customs have long been models for other Arab countries, provides an instructive case. In the 1920s, veiling fell out of fashion and women entered universities.

Having won the right to vote in 1956, Egyptian women went into politics, securing reforms such as an official (widely ignored) ban on female circumcision, as well as winning senior posts in government. In 1967, a personal-status law that would have superseded traditional Islamic rules and guaranteed absolute equality in family matters was tabled. But then came war with Israel, and the law died.

A conservative tide spearheaded by Islamic fundamentalists has since stalled women's progress. Under a 1980 constitutional amendment, Islamic law was enshrined as Egypt's "chief source of legislation". Accused by Islamists of bowing to western notions of femininity, the women's movement lost steam. With Islamic law on their side, Egyptian men may divorce their wives with a simple oath. Women must pursue divorce laboriously through the courts, a process that can take six years. Given that a third of Egyptian women have been beaten by their husbands, according to a 1995 survey, such delays are punitive.

Furthermore, divorced mothers have right of custody only up to the age of 12 for girls, and ten for boys, after which the child must be surrendered to the father. And though Islamic law protects women's right to property, it allots them only half the share of male relations in inheritance. Even Egyptian criminal law, based on old French models, is discriminatory. A man who catches his wife in an act of adultery and murders her can expect a sentence of just three years, whereas his wife in similar circumstances would face a full life sentence. Nor do women have the right to pass on their nationality. About 80,000 Egyptian children, many of them products of brief marriages to Gulf Arabs, have no nationality, and so no right to free public education or other services.

Yet the picture is not all bleak. Laws may hold Egyptian women back, but their education continues to improve. Between 1970 and 1998, the proportion of girls

attending primary school rose from 50% to 72%. Likewise, between 1976 and 1995, the number of women with jobs climbed from 6% to 23%.

The same story applies throughout the Arab world. Women have won more schooling and jobs, but precious little political influence. The percentage of girls attending school in Oman, for example, has more than quadrupled since the 1970s. In Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, more women attend university than men—although this is partly because men tend to go abroad for their education. And in all Arab countries where statistics are available, women's share of the workforce has at least doubled in the past 20 years.

Yet everywhere in the Arab world, discriminatory rules continue to bolster entrenched patriarchal attitudes. The effects are striking. Only 3% of Arab parliamentarians are women, for example, compared with a world average of 13%. In most Arab cities, unmarried women rarely dare to live alone. Those who venture into male preserves, such as cafés, are considered fair game for harassment. In a stark manifestation of male chauvinism, laws in many countries grant leniency to men who kill female relations suspected of tarnishing family "honour".

As in Egypt, progress on women's issues halted in other Arab states when frightened governments tried to buy off conservative opponents by polishing their Islamic credentials. Now, with the Islamist threat abated, momentum for change is beginning to build again, at least in some countries. A handful of governments have even recognised women as a potential bulwark against Islamist influence. And Arab women's organisations are again pressing their agenda.

Mohammed, the new king of Morocco, used his first public speech to call for further women's emancipation, to the dismay of his more conservative subjects. One of his ministers has since proposed

reforms to ban polygamy, raise the minimum age of marriage and alter the inheritance laws in women's favour. The Jordanian government has asked its parliament to change the light sentencing of "honour" killers—though parliament is doing what it can to resist such change. Even Egypt is busy streamlining its divorce proceedings.

Moreover, in the arch-conservative Gulf, change is afoot. Earlier this year, women in Qatar voted in municipal elections and even stood for office, though none won it. In Oman, the sultan has appointed women to his consultative council. In Saudi Arabia, too, there are muted hints at reform. This summer, a powerful prince publicly criticised the kingdom's ban on women drivers. In October, women were allowed for the first time to attend, as observers, sessions of the Shura, an appointed body which is the kingdom's only representative institution. But they were sternly reminded by the Shura's chairman that Islamic law, as he sees it, denies them any right to public office.

Saudi Arabia:

The Independent, 15 May 2000

http://www.independent.co.uk/news/World/Middle_East/2000-05/harveynichols170500.shtml

Your highness, is that Gucci or Dior under your veil?

Saudi Arabia is strictly Islamic. Women must wear robes and veils. So why has Harvey Nichols opened a store there? To cater for very rich, fashion-conscious princesses, of course

By James Sherwood

17 May 2000

On Sunday Harvey Nichols launched its first flagship store of the millennium. If I told you all the women in the room wore head-to-toe black, you wouldn't be at all surprised. Honey, it's a fashion party after all. You would, however, be shocked to

learn that women were on the whole conspicuously absent from the gala dinner for 1200 royals, millionaires and dignitaries. Welcome to Harvey Nichols Riyadh, 80,000sq ft of designer frocks in the heart of the new Sir Norman Foster-designed Al Faisaliah Centre.

Unlike the glitzy Saudi resort of Dubai, Riyadh is not a Gulf golf tourist-trap. This Middle Eastern city is a bastion of Islam where all Saudi women must wear the veil in public. A woman cannot be seen in public with any man bar her husband, and cannot drive a car. Fashion magazines are forbidden, as are adverts depicting the human body. Even shop mannequins with heads or hands are banned. Patsy and Edina would provoke a fatwah before they even left the airport.

So why should Knightsbridge's raciest designer department store choose to take the veil? "If I told you that Riyadh has 9,000 princesses, then you might begin to understand why Harvey Nichols belongs in Riyadh," says the company's buying director Sue Whiteley. "A woman must wear the abaya in public, but she will be wearing Western clothes beneath the veil. The princesses will entertain at all-female parties in their palaces. This is their party circuit. The level of sophistication and fashion knowledge is incredible. You'd imagine they'd be dripping in Chanel but the most popular label in Riyadh is Donna Karan."

It is no secret that Saudi princesses keep Paris couture alive. The most infamous Saudi fashionplate is Mouna Al-Ayoub, the Lebanese former wife of Saudi businessman Nasser Al-Rachid, who will routinely order 30 pieces of Paris couture per season. Riyadh, it seems has another 9,000 Mounas with comparable time and money at their disposal.

Harvey Nichols Riyadh slips effortlessly between Leeds little sister (50,000sq ft) and Knightsbridge big mama (150,000sq ft). In midtown Riyadh, the Al Faisaliah Centre stacks up Saudi's first skyscraper (276m high), a subterranean banqueting

hall, 40,000sq m retail mall, a five-star hotel and a luxury apartment complex. Saks 5th Avenue is due to join within the year.

"Riyadh is an emerging market with no quality retail," says Harvey Nichols Group commercial director Patrick Hanley. "It also has a population of three and a half million whereas Dubai, maybe a more obvious choice, has under a million. As the home of the Saudi royal family, Riyadh also has a formal, extravagant court circular. No one will see these women in Western clothes apart from their husbands and other women at home. That doesn't mean they are not informed about Western taste levels. They are a very sophisticated, educated and well-travelled people."

When Sue Whiteley went on a research mission to Riyadh she found major stand-alone stores for Donna Karan, Christian Dior, Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana. "These are all closed shops," she says, "which means women must be veiled and accompanied by husbands. They are staffed by men, and the women don't try anything on. They were quite depressing spaces. They weren't addressing the taste levels or fashion knowledge of these women."

Harvey Nichols Riyadh is a combination of open and closed. Of the 80,000sq ft, 10,000 is set aside for personal shopping. This sanctuary is women only. The princesses can leave their drivers in the chauffeur's lounge and retreat to the privacy of the closed section to try on their clothes, experiment with make-up at one of 20 cosmetics stations. "There is very little for women to do in Riyadh," says Whiteley. "We want Harvey Nichols to be a destination for the ladies to come and spend the day, as women do in Knightsbridge."

Harvey Nichols say they want to bring the personality of Knightsbridge to Riyadh. But the two cultures are as different as Patsy Stone and the Singing Nun. Harvey Nichols is aiming to be the

Jemima Khan of fashion retail, marrying Western Style with Islamic culture.

"I was amazed to see the young Saudi princes telling me they would like to see labels like Patrick Cox, Alexander McQueen, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Maharishi and Mandarin Duck. When men come of age they wear the long white thobe and headdress but they wear Western clothes when in Europe or the States. When wearing the thobe, Saudi men will accessorise with a fantastic Mont Blanc pen, Alfred Dunhill cufflinks or a superb Patek Philippe watch. The briefcase is an important status symbol, too. So the emphasis is on accessories rather than suiting."

For the princesses, Sue Whiteley has made sure her floor features major eveningwear designers like Randolph Duke (designer of Hilary Swank's knockout Oscar frock), Badgley Mischka, Vera Wang, Valentino and Amanda Wakeley. The demand and occasions to wear floor-length eveningwear in Riyadh is even greater than in Hollywood.

So the next time you see one of those haunting, black-clad Saudi ladies floating around Harvey Nichols Knightsbridge, don't let your Western prejudices move you to pity her. Beneath, these gals are probably wearing a smarter Donna Karan pant suit than you could dream of, their make-up will make yours look like it's been applied with a trowel and their jewellery will probably be worth more cash than you will see in a lifetime. Theirs is a life of private parties, haute couture and first-class travel. And they never have to do a day's work in their lives. Oh, and the sun always shines in Saudi.

Dubai:

The New Indian Express
Feb 10, 1999

Dow Jones creates new Islamic market index

DUBAI: In a bid to attract investors from Islamic countries, Dow Jones is

launching the first global equity benchmark index for those who want to follow Islamic investment guidelines. The Dow Jones Islamic market index tracks 600 'Shari'ah Law' compliant stocks from 30 countries with total market capitalisation of nearly 7.5 trillion dollars. "We are extremely proud and excited to serve the growing Islamic investor community" David Moran, president of Dow Jones indexes said in a press statement from Bahrain, reports PTI.

"Now Islamic and social and ethical investors will be able to make informed decisions on the merits of their present investment portfolios, as investors around the world currently do with the Dow Jones Industrial Average." Dow Jones also announced it has issued a licence to Brown Brothers Harriman and Company, a wall street private bank and Wafra investment advisory group, a wholly owned subsidiary of Kuwait's public institution for social security, to create tradable funds based on the new index. To ensure that all securities selected for the Dow Jones Islamic market index are acceptable under Shari'ah law, a Shari'ah supervisory board of Islamic scholars will advise Dow Jones indexes.

The members of the board are Justice Muhammad Taqi Usmani of Pakistan, Dr Abdul Sattar Abu-Ghuddah of Syria, Dr Mohamed Elgari of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Nizam Yaquby of Bahrain and Shaikh Talal Delorenzo of the United States.

Bangladesh: Women Demand Equality, Gov't Cites Religious Bar

By Tabibul Islam

DHAKA, Jun 14 [1999] (IPS) - When it comes to property, both majority Muslims and minority Hindus in Bangladesh discriminate against women. Under the Muslim law of inheritance, a daughter is eligible to only half the share of property

given to a son while Hinduism does not specify her share.

Women's rights groups have been demanding equal rights to property, and also a uniform family code in Bangladesh to give women rights to property, marriage, divorce, guardianship of children, and other things. The Constitution treats each citizen fairly. It declares "the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth."

Prominent lawyer Salma Khan, chairperson of the U.N Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee believes women in patriarchal Bangladesh suffer injustices from birth.

Islamic laws, she argues, are not the only obstacle to equality before law, because inheritance has been made a subject of civil courts in other Muslim countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Nigeria. "There is no doubt that in doing so some obstacles must be faced, but the government and all concerned have to move forward with firm determination," she said.

But Bangladesh Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru said his government is committed to affirmative action for women, "but it is not possible for a democratic government to take a step that might hurt the religious faith of the people".

Asked if this meant that inheritance laws would never change in women's favour, he skillfully side-stepped the question by saying that first people have to be prepared to accept change before a decision is taken. Discrimination against women is ingrained in society. When a son is born, 'azan' or blessings are called out by the mullahs in mosques, while the family mourns the birth of a daughter. A girl is taught from childhood that virtue lies in sacrifice. She is taught to be subservient, and to endure all oppression in silence. Self-esteem is not deemed a

virtue. A woman who eats last and least and quietly takes all the abuse from her husband is considered an ideal woman, particularly in rural Bangladesh. Women in the villages work longer and harder than menfolk, caring for domestic animals, in the fields, tending children, and cooking. All the boiling, drying and husking of paddy is exclusively women's work. Hours spent in household activities like caring for elderly relatives and the sick are not seen as work since they do not earn money for the family.

As farm labour, women get roughly 40 percent of a man's wage, according to researchers.

Dr Atiar Rahman, a research fellow of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), has calculated in a recent study that women work 21 hours more in a week than men.

Similarly the U.N children's agency, UNICEF, estimates that boys who do not go to school spend only 12 minutes on house work daily, while girls who have dropped out shoulder five hours of work around the work. As a result of her work load and child bearing responsibilities, women age much faster than men, and suffer from anaemia and other problems related to nutrition deficiency.

Take Mariam who works as a domestic in a home in the capital city. She is worn out after having three children in four years, but her husband and his family refuse to consider family planning options because they want a boy.

Equal property rights for daughters would go a long way in raising their social status, rights activists campaigning for an end to gender discrimination feel.

Lawyer Sigma Huda of the Bangladesh Society for Implementation of Human Rights refuses to believe the discrimination between men and women is sanctioned by religion.

Reforming the Muslim inheritance laws would not clash with personal laws, she insists. "It must be remembered that the

“Muslim Family Laws ordinance of 1961 was passed establishing different issues which are implied and not supported by the Holy Koran,” she says. Also, the Bangladesh Constitution of 1972, which assures women equality, has coexisted with the Shariah Laws, even though they contradict each other, points out Farida Akhter, a well-known rights activists. Ensuring daughters have the legal right to an equal share of parental property would conform with the fundamental rights of the Constitution, and the government has an obligation to fulfill the right, she said. (END/IPS/ti/an/99)

Source: IPS GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS BULLETIN, 21 JUNE, 1999

Bangladesh: Rural Women Suffer “Fatwa” Tyranny

DHAKA, Bangladesh - June 28, 1999 (IPS): Teenager Badoi Begum died in her village home in Sylhet district, some 250-km east of the Bangladesh capital, late last month after she was publicly caned on the order of the “fatwabaj” or local morality minders.

Her fault was that she had become pregnant as a result of a relationship with a young man from the same village, and the fatwabaj decreed that her crime constituted adultery and she should be given 101 lashes in public.

The “fatwa” or edict issued was carried out immediately, and the unfortunate girl died the next day from excessive bleeding and shock.

Police have arrested three people in this connection and an investigation is underway, but the local people are certain the fatwabaj will be set free because they are influential and have money.

All across this mainly Muslim country these religious upholders of social morality increasingly wield considerable

influence among the largely illiterate and poor rural population.

Fatwabaj themselves are not conversant with the various aspects of the “Shariah,” the Islamic laws, because of their own poor education. Yet their frequently aired fatwas are heeded by villagers.

More than two dozen cases of women being publicly lashed and thrown out from villages were reported in the last two years. But the actual number is probably much higher, since mullahs (clerics) are the law in the remote rural areas.

Rural women are the main victims of the fatwa tyranny. The fatwabaj have also got after the influential non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of Bangladesh.

Shamsul Huq, director of the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), an apex body of NGOs, said the recent activities of some fundamentalist political organizations and religious groups have become a cause for worry.

Fatwabaj have identified NGOs as their principal target for trying to make rural women educated and self-reliant, he said.

Attacks on women’s gatherings, NGO-run schools, NGO offices and even the felling of trees planted at the initiative of voluntary groups have been carried out, he said, in response to inflammatory proclamations by mullahs and fatwabaj.

Their anti-people activities must be countered with public awareness raising campaigns before it starts to damage the progress made in Bangladesh, he said.

Bangladesh has suddenly been witness to a gradual emergence of extremist groups like Hirkatul Zihad al Islami and Kamaat-e-Tola led by leaders who are working covertly and overtly to bring about a Taliban-style Islamic revolution in the country.

The attempt on the life of the celebrated liberal poet, Shamsur Rahman, by members of Hirkatul Zihad in January

this year revealed the extent to which these groups were prepared to go.

The group has a hit-list of some prominent Bangladeshis who are known for their progressive views.

Police investigations into the assassination attempt are pointing to a link between the members of the Hirkatul Zihad and Saudi-political fugitive Osama bin Laden, now living incognito in Afghanistan.

It is also estimated that since the Hirkatul Zihad was set up in 1992, it has trained some 25,000 recruits mainly students from "madrashas" (religious schools) who are indoctrinated in an ideology that glorifies martyrdom. Most recruits have been boys who are either orphans or from very poor families.

Intelligence agencies say the Hirkatul Zihad has links with "terrorist" groups in the Middle East, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Burma, and receive up to half a million dollars every year to carry out their activities to make Bangladesh a fundamentalist Islamic state.

Leaders of the pro-Islamic political organizations have issued fatwas denying women the right to be leaders, despite both Bangladesh's most important leaders being women.

Former president and chairman of the Jatiya Party, Hussain Mohamad Ershad, has been quoted saying in public that only male leaders can make Bangladesh a great country. In his opinion, the "days of woman leadership is over."

Syed Fazlul Karim, a religious leader and head of the Islamic Constitution Movement, said "Islam does not recognize woman leadership.

A country led by a woman can never make progress. A country with a woman leader is the result of sins."

And Mufti Fazlul Huq Amini, a top leader of the Islamic Unity Alliance, who says he is a supporter of Osama bin Laden,

has urged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed to establish Islamic rule. Otherwise her government would be toppled, he has warned.

Ordinary people however, have shown they are not swept away by religious dogma. At the last general election in 1996, only three members of the right-wing Jamaat-e-Islamic won, compared to the party's strength of 18 in the previous Bangladesh parliament. Religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh has been losing ground, says Abdur Rahman of the left-leaning Workers Party.

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http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_381000/381764.stm
BBC News: World: South Asia
June 30, 1999

Death threat for Bangladesh sculptor

A leading Bangladeshi sculptor, Shamim Sikder, says she has received death threats from Islamic militants.

Ms Sikder told the BBC the threats were made in a letter and a telephone call from a little-known group calling itself the Taleban Bahini (Taleban Force).

The group is believed to object in particular to a sculpture by Ms Sikder commemorating the role of women in Bangladesh's independence war against Pakistan.

Ms Sikder, who teaches at Dhaka's Fine Arts Institute, said she was threatened over the telephone and in a letter signed by the "Commander, Taleban Bahini." She was warned that she would be kidnapped and killed if she did not stop sculpting.

Earlier this year, an exhibition of Ms Sikder's work entitled "Struggle for Freedom" opened at Dhaka University. The exhibits showcased major events in Bangladesh's history.

Ms Sikder plans to continue working but has said she will take steps to protect herself.

According to AFP, Inspector General of Police Abdul Siddique said he had ordered an investigation into the threats.

"I have told relevant officials to deal with the matter and it is up to them how they will handle it," he said.

Militant attacks

A prominent Bangladeshi poet Shamsur Rahman was attacked by militants in January and the feminist writer, Taslima Nasreen, now in exile, says she has received many death threats.

Hundreds of militants held regular demonstrations against Ms Nasreen during her four-month stay in Bangladesh to be with her dying mother. She left the country in January.

Islamic militant groups, reported to include Bangladeshis who fought in Afghanistan and Bosnia, have been extending their activities, but the political influence of Islamic parties is limited.

Bangladesh: Women Resist Patriarchal Custodial Laws

By Tabibul Islam

DHAKA, Jul 2 (IPS) - Every year Bangladesh sees some three thousand divorces many of them resulting in heartrending separations of mothers from their children thanks to patriarchal laws which give fathers custodial rights.

The laws allow divorced women mere caretakership of sons until the age of seven and that of daughters until puberty. Many ex-husbands also succeed in forcibly taking away their younger wards from helpless mothers.

According to Bangladesh's legal system, on divorce, the father is recognised as the legal guardian of children, a provision which often results in maltreatment by

stepmothers who may be burdened with the care of their own offspring..

A typical case is that of Renu, a post-graduate degree holder. When her husband divorced her two years ago to marry again, he secured custody of their five-year-old son through a family court. Two years later when the boy suffered maltreatment from his stepmother - who had delivered a child of her own meanwhile - he ran back to his mother's home.

But the father promptly accused Renu of abduction and got her arrested. Renu who was finally rescued by human rights activists can do nothing but agonise for her son as her husband has kept the case against her pending.

In Bangladesh, no child can be admitted to school unless the father's name is mentioned in the application form. Recently, in neighbouring India, courts upheld the equal right of women to act as guardians for their school-going children.

With hundreds of divorced women sharing a similar plight women's rights groups are clamouring to do away with laws which deprive children the care and affection of their natural mothers. "The women of Bangladesh should unite to wage a movement to do away with these highly discriminatory laws," says Ela Chanda, a lawyer and human rights activist.

According to Chanda these laws are not only a violation of human rights but also an insult to womenfolk who have to cope with childbearing and infant care but do not enjoy the natural rights of motherhood.

In poverty-ridden Bangladesh where medical facilities are meagre, pregnancy and child birth can be an ordeal for most women and often prove fatal. Every year, complications related to childbirth claim the lives of 30,000 women.

Rights activists see the problem as part of the larger issue of improving the status of

women in a country steeped in patriarchy and Islamic values.

Khusi Kabir, coordinator of 'Nijera Kori' a leading non-government organisation (NGO) involved in human rights activities has demanded that the government introduce a uniform family code irrespective of religion and gender.

"A uniform family code is the only way to equal rights for women in the matter of child custody as well as in other issues that affect women such as a share in the property of parents," she said. The subordinate status of women in society is evident in their limited say in family matters and in inheritance laws which say they can only claim half the share that a brother gets in their parents' property. According to a UNICEF report, women in this country are exposed to violence more in their own homes than outside and are frequently subjected to mental and physical torture by husbands and in-laws.

Women do not enjoy the right of choosing their life partners and often they see their husbands, chosen for them by parents or other relatives, for the first time at the nuptials.

- From childhood, women are taught to unquestioningly obey orders from

male family members. Marriage brings little security and husbands have cited such flimsy reasons as delay in serving food for demanding divorce.

But commoner reasons for divorce are failure to bring in sufficient dowry, or fulfil dowry commitments, failure to produce a male child, sexual maladjustment and easy availability of women for subsequent marriages.

While it is illegal for a man to take a second wife without the permission of the first, few men register subsequent marriages which makes it difficult to launch legal proceedings though there is little chance of that succeeding.

_ In Bangladesh's patriarchal society women can expect little support when conflicts arise and consequently have to put up with threats, violence and even illicit relationships from their husbands if they are to avoid divorce.

Rights activists says that education and empowerment alone are insufficient to change such an entrenched situation and have called for enlightenment of both men and women to ensure a future in which there is mutual respect between the sexes. (END/IPS/ti/rdr/99)

Source: IPS GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS BULLETIN, 5 JULY, 1999

Voice of America

168 Bangladeshi Women Attacked With Acid in 1999

DHAKA, Bangladesh, March 14, 2000 (VOA): Violence against women is a common phenomenon around the world. However, in Bangladesh, violence against women takes an uniquely horrific form. Last year in Bangladesh, there were more than 160 documented cases of women being assaulted by having acid thrown in their faces. VOA's Jim Teeple reports acid attacks are on the rise in Bangladesh but there are now new efforts being made to help the victims and prevent the attacks.

Eight-year-old Nurjahan sings a song she used to sing all the time in her school. As she sings she clutches the arm of her 13-year-old sister Bilkis. Both girls no longer attend school and probably never will again.

Just a few months ago Bilkis and Nurjahan were carefree young girls living in a small village in Bangladesh. That was before a young man in the village decided he wanted to marry 13-year-old Bilkis. When Bilkis spurned his advances, the young man and several of his friends crept into her parent's house late one

night and poured acid over Bilkis and Nurjahan as they slept.

With their burned and blistered faces Bilkis and Nurjahan are just two of the 168 victims of acid attacks reported in Bangladesh last year. John Morrison — a British aid worker who is the Director of the Acid Survivors Foundation, established in 1999 to help victims of the attacks — says it does not take much to ruin a woman's life in Bangladesh.

MORRISON: "It is sulfuric acid — mainly sulfuric acid that is used in a wide range of industries and around the home. It can be used in car batteries and so on. It is possible to go into a shop here in Dhaka and buy a cupful of acid for about ten U.S. cents, and with that cupful of acid you can destroy a woman's face."

Since 1996, acid attacks against women have doubled in Bangladesh. Most acid attacks are carried out by young men, whose advances have been rejected. There also are cases involving dowry and property disputes.

The first acid attack against a woman was reported in the 1960's and it was not until the 1990's that the attacks became widespread. New laws have made attacking someone with acid a capital crime in Bangladesh. Last year, four men were given life terms. However, only ten percent of the cases ever make it to trial.

For the victims of such attacks, there is not only physical pain but also severe psychological and emotional stress. Most are young women and the attacks mean they will never be able to marry or lead normal lives. Nearly all know their attackers. In some cases, the attacks are even carried out by relatives. It is also not unusual for victims to be rejected by their own families after an attack.

Until last year, Fazila was 18-year-old honor student in her local village. That was before a classmate who had hounded her for years with marriage proposals threw acid in her face as she left school one day. Fazila says her family

has not rejected, her but that they are too poor to visit Dhaka where she now lives. Fazila says, more than anything, else she wants to see her attacker go on trial so he and others who commit such attacks can be confronted with the cruelty they have inflicted.

"I just want a trial — a good trial so that they can understand that acid throwing is not an easy thing. It is so painful and there is so much agony that they should know about this."

There is some hope for women like Fazila. The Acid Survivors Foundation, established in 1999, has opened Thikana House where about 20 young women and girls now live and where they receive medical treatment. Fazila, Belkis and Nurjahan all live at Thikana House and they will be able to stay there until they are able to support themselves. The Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association helps to file cases and provides financial assistance to survivors who press cases against their attackers.

The plight of the acid survivors has generated interest among plastic surgeons around the world and several women have received treatment abroad — most recently in Spain. Plastic surgeons have also traveled to Bangladesh to help survivors. Doctor S.L. Sen is a leading plastic surgeon in Bangladesh who has established a special burn unit at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital to treat acid attack survivors. Dr. Sen says acid burns should be immediately washed with clean water. He says that can prevent much permanent damage. But the Bangladeshi plastic surgeon says, by the time he sees many of his patients, too much time has passed.

SEN: "They come after one week, or two weeks or even three weeks and by that time so by this time the wound has already become infected. So, if we could get these patients earlier we could do something better for them."

Still, Dr. Sen says in many cases as much as 60 percent of a woman's face can be reconstructed following an acid attack.

The Bangladeshi doctor says he will never forget his first case, 12 years ago, and he constantly thinks about how the attacks can be prevented.

Dr. Sen and others say educating young men about the consequences of the attacks is critical. Recently, the Bangladeshi National Cricket Team's members — important role models to many young men — spoke out against acid attacks. By all accounts the campaign achieved its goal of raising public awareness among men about the attacks.

Those involved in the fight against acid attacks say it is too early to tell if the campaign will result in fewer attacks but they say it is an important first step towards achieving that goal.

BBC News - South Asia

Bangladesh bans new Taslima book

Friday, August 13, 1999 Published at 11:43 GMT 12:43 UK

World: South Asia

Bangladesh bans new Taslima book

Taslima Nasreen: Facing a new ban by the authorities

By Kamal Ahmed in Dhaka

The Bangladeshi Government has banned yet another book by the controversial feminist writer Taslima Nasreen.

This is the second ban this year on Ms Nasreen's writings.

Earlier, a poem written in memory of her mother who died from cancer attracted government disapproval.

The poem was published in an Indian Bengali-language weekly magazine and

the Bangladeshi Government blocked imports of the magazine.

Now, the government has said it will not allow Ms Nasreen's book, *My Childhood*, from being imported, sold or distributed in Bangladesh.

It also said that the book might create what it called adverse effects and hurt the people's religious sentiments.

The first book by Ms Nasreen to have been banned by the Bangladeshi Government was *Lajja* or *Shame*.

She was reported to have told an Indian newspaper that Islamic religious edicts should be changed - comments that provoked anger among some militant Islamic groups.

The militants pronounced a death sentence on the writer and offered \$2,000 dollars to anyone who killed her.

Ms Nasreen's situation was likened to the writer Salman Rushdie when she had to flee the country in August 1994.

She returned late last year to visit her ailing mother and faced renewed threats from extremist Islamic activists.

After her mother's death, Ms Nasreen left the country and is reported to be living in Paris.

BBC News Online: World: Middle East
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Egyptian women's rights: A century on

By Caroline Hawley in Cairo

When it was published 100 years ago, the book entitled *The Liberation of Women* caused uproar.

Its author - a judge called Qassem Amin - was the subject of a torrent of criticism after arguing that improving the status of women would help Egypt develop.

A century on, women have made many strides towards to his, and their, goal.

They can vote; they are significant part of the workforce and there are now two women in the Egyptian cabinet.

But they're not allowed to travel abroad without the permission of their husbands; it's hard for them to initiate divorce; and they can't - like Qassem Amin - become judges.

Scholars from across the Arab world, as well as Europe and the United States, have gathered in Cairo to discuss what's been achieved.

'We haven't progressed' Hoda Badran, one of the organisers of the commemoration celebrations, says progress has now stalled.

"Yemen has judges, Sudan has judges; the general prosecutor in Syria is a woman. If you compare us to other Arab countries, we are behind. Other countries are going forward.

"Take Kuwait for example: Kuwait didn't have woman voting or having political rights; they are having it now. So it's a progress, even if we had our political rights as Egyptian woman before. But we haven't progressed."

Earlier this year, there was a small step forward.

The Egyptian cabinet decided to cancel a law that allows a rapist to walk free if he marries his victim.

But women activists say there's still a long way to go to remove other discriminatory laws and achieve the liberation of women.

UN Wire
20 January 2000

Egypt: Women's Rights Bill Wins Preliminary Approval

The Egyptian Parliament gave preliminary approval on Sunday to a controversial bill that could make it easier for women

to divorce and travel abroad without their husbands' permission, BBC Online reports (17 Jan). The proposed law would also set up a special court for family affairs.

Existing law allows women to divorce under specific circumstances in which she can prove mistreatment, while a man can divorce his wife simply by saying "I divorce you" three times, according to Agence France-Presse.

The new bill, however, would allow women to seek a divorce on the grounds of "incompatibility" in exchange for renouncing her right to financial claims (AFP, 17 Jan). She would also have to return her dowry.

Some women say the proposed changes are insufficient, as they will mainly benefit wealthy women who can afford to pay back the dowry and forgo alimony (BBC Online).

Government statistics show that 1.5 million divorce petitions are filed annually in Egypt, and 7 million people are currently seeking legal separation (Reuters/MSNBC.com, 15 Jan).

Those who oppose the bill asked President Hosni Mubarak to postpone debate for at least three months to ensure that the bill is "in the interests of the nation" and that it would "guarantee the stability of the Muslim family and its members" (AFP).

According to BBC Online, many men are "outraged" by the bill, which they see as un-Islamic and "a recipe for the disintegration of the family." One parliamentarian said the bill would lead to more murders of women because men will not accept having their wives walk out on them.

Despite the opposition, BBC Online says the bill is expected to pass (BBC Online). Debate on the measure was adjourned until 25 January, when detailed discussion of its articles will begin (AFP II, 17 Jan).

Related Stories: #1.

BBC NEWS

Monday, 17 January, 2000, 16:03 GMT
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/middle_east/newsid_607000/607209.stm

Egypt backs rights for women

Some men see the legislation as a 'feminist ploy'

The Egyptian parliament has given preliminary approval to a new bill making it easier for women to divorce and to travel abroad without their husband's permission.

At present it is extremely difficult for a woman to end the marriage and she has to prove strong grounds, such as ill treatment.

The bill, which has been extremely controversial in Egypt, now has to be discussed clause by clause before a final vote.

Egyptian women are an increasing presence in the workforce

The debate is expected to resume a week on Tuesday.

Article 20 of the bill would allow a woman to obtain a divorce on grounds of incompatibility, as long as she gives up the right to alimony payments and returns her dowry.

The current law only allows a woman to divorce in specific cases such as mistreatment at the hands of her husband, and then only if she can provide proof.

In contrast, a man can divorce his wife simply by saying "I divorce you" three times.

Addressing the parliament, Egypt's top Muslim cleric Sheikh Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi said the bill had been studied "thoroughly" to ensure it was in line with Islamic teachings.

Critics say the law will not help poor women

The Prophet Mohammed is said to have told a woman she could leave her husband even though he had done her no harm as long as she returned a garden he had given her.

But BBC correspondent Caroline Hawley says some women have complained that the changes do not go far enough, as they will mainly benefit wealthy women who can afford to pay back the dowry and forgo alimony.

But she adds that many men are outraged by the bill which they see as un-Islamic and a recipe for the disintegration of the family.

One MP said he thought it would lead to more murders of women because, he said, men would not accept having their wives walk out on them.

The law is expected to pass, although almost all of Egypt's MPs are men.

See also:

16 Jan 00 | Middle East

Egypt debates better deal for women

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/middle_east/newsid_605000/605528.stm

BBC News Online: World: Middle East
 Saturday, 29 January, 2000, 23:05 GMT

First Egyptian woman files for divorce

An Egyptian mother of two has become the first woman to file for divorce since parliament approved a new law on Wednesday allowing women to divorce their husbands for incompatibility. Waffa Mossaad Gabr, 32, from the northern area of Tanta, said in her petition to the family court that she had no particular complaint against her husband but "hated living with him".

Her husband had previously refused to give her a divorce.

Mrs Gabr said she was ready to give up all her financial rights, as required under

the legislation, in order to divorce the man she married in 1986.

The new law, approved by President Hosni Mubarak on Saturday, will only take effect in a month's time, and Mrs Gabr's court hearing is set for 14 March.

Arbitrators

Under the legislation, the court where the wife applies for a divorce must appoint two arbitrators from the spouses' families.

If they confirm the couple's incompatibility, the wife then tells the court she hates her husband and fears she cannot fulfill her conjugal duties "as laid down by God".

Judges will give the couple three months to try to effect a reconciliation and six months if they have children.

An immediate divorce will be granted at the end of the trial period if they don't change their minds.

Under the new law, women who divorce their husbands must return their dowries and relinquish all financial claims, including alimony.

When Mrs Gabr gets her divorce she will have to return the 101 Egyptian pounds (\$30) she got as dowry from her husband.

But she would still get child support payments for her three children.

The legislation replaces an old law that allows a woman to divorce only in specific cases such as mistreatment by her husband, and then only if she can provide proof.

By contrast, a man can divorce his wife simply by saying "I divorce you" three times.

"Congratulations"

Parliament approved the bill after deleting a controversial article that would have allowed women to travel abroad despite their husbands' opposition.

The new law was described by hardline Muslim clergymen as a threat to the

stability of society, but was hailed by women groups who viewed it as a restoration of their human rights.

"Congratulations to women and to Egypt," said Hoda Badran, president of the Alliance of Arab Women.

The new law, she says, will make men "respect the marital relationship and know that a woman is not a slave".

Sheik Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, the world's premier seat of Sunni Islam learning, said there was no theological flaw in the new legislation.

"The law has been studied by al-Azhar committee of scholars. It doesn't carry anything that is contradictory to Islam," he said.

Egypt:

Sydney Morning Herald

29 Jan 2000

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/0001/29/world/world14.html>

New divorce rights for Islamic women

By Susan Sachs in Cairo

After an impassioned debate about Islam, the family and the role of women, the Egyptian Parliament has voted to give women the ability to divorce their husbands without first having to prove to judges that they have been mistreated.

President Hosni Mubarak, whose party controls the 454-member Parliament, proposed the hotly debated legislation and is expected to sign it next week.

Opponents of the change argued that Islam gave only men the right to initiate divorce. They said that extending the right to women, described in Parliament and the media as emotionally capricious and vengeful, would lead to a breakdown of family life.

Proponents said that even the prophet Muhammad had allowed an unhappy woman to end her marriage against her husband's wishes, although she was first ordered to return her dowry.

Many clerics supported the change, including the government-appointed mufti and the sheik of Al Azhar University in Cairo, the world's oldest Islamic teaching institution.

"This is a victory for women who spend years and years of their lives seeking divorce and never getting it," said Hosn Shah, a writer and one of the women who campaigned for the changes. "These rules were in the Islamic law 1,400 years ago. But it is men who do not apply them," she said.

Divorce will still be more complicated for a woman than a man, reflecting the conservative nature of Egypt's male-oriented society.

A woman will have two choices.

She will be able to use the present procedure, which requires her to have witnesses to prove to a judge that her husband has behaved badly enough to justify divorce, perhaps because he has beaten her or failed to provide for her.

That process is generally protracted and usually ends in a ruling against the wife.

The new option will be to demand a divorce simply on the grounds of incompatibility.

But a woman will have to wait six months if she has children, or three months if she does not, while a judge tries to reconcile the partners.

If she still wants the divorce, a judge will have to grant it.

But the woman will have to return all money, property and gifts she received in the marriage and forgo alimony.

A Muslim man in Egypt can now end a marriage by saying, "I divorce thee," three times, or by filing a paper with a government registrar that declares he is

divorcing his wife. Under the change, a man will be required to file the divorce paper.

- The New York Times

Indonesia:

New York Times, October 24, 1999

<http://www.nytimes.com/library/review/102499indonesia-review.html>

Secular Rules In Indonesia, Islamic Politics Doesn't Mean Religion

By Seth Mydans

AKARTA, Indonesia — It doesn't take a theologian to describe the political role of Islam here.

"We are Muslims, but when we vote, we put Islam to one side," said Hasan Bisri, a 60-year-old fisherman, as he waited to cast his ballot in a general election last June. "In Indonesia we put the nation first and our religion second."

This may sound odd to many Americans, who for 20 years have looked at Iran as the model for Islamic rule and are therefore wary of the prospect of Islamic clerics taking power anywhere. Last week, Indonesia's legislature elected Abdurrahman Wahid, a frail Muslim cleric as President, and so it is fair to ask just what the relationship of religion and politics is here.

Indonesia is, after all, the world's most populous Muslim nation.

For most of Indonesia, Hasan, the fisherman, got it right. Indonesians are quick to tell you that they form a determinedly secular nation — and that this is no anomaly. Islam, they say, is a tolerant faith; the xenophobia and radicalism associated with it in Iran, Afghanistan and parts of North Africa are, in their minds, more Middle Eastern in origin than Islamic.

Though close to 90 percent of Indonesia's 200 million people describe themselves as Muslims, this will be the first time in modern times that they will be governed by a religious leader.

None of the dozen Muslim parties that contested the June election — which selected the National Assembly that chose Wahid — called for an Islamic state. And even among these, Wahid's philosophy is considered the most moderate and inclusive, so much so that he may have more political trouble from other Muslim parties than from secular nationalists and military leaders, who also support him.

Wahid, 59, is the chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, a moderate Islamic society that claims to have 30 million members.

But his power base is far broader. His backers included an old-guard political party, at least part of the parliamentary bloc of the military, and the bloc of Islamic parties. Once elected, he brought the nation's secular nationalists under his big tent by choosing their leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri, as his Vice President.

Wahid, who is popularly known by his nickname Gus Dur, "is the most tolerant and the most nationalistic among the Muslim leaders and the one most trusted amongst the minorities," said a prominent political scientist, Jusuf Wanandi, a member of the ethnic Chinese minority.

"Therefore if we are going to have a Muslim leader, it's good that we have this guy to see how it is going to play out," Wanandi said. "This might as well be the time to try it."

Another ethnic Chinese political analyst, Arief Budiman, said: "He is the hero of some Christians here. As a matter of fact, some Muslim leaders are suspicious that Gus Dur is an agent of the Christians."

The optimism about Wahid's presidency, among many people here, extends to one of the most potentially destabilizing

issues he will face: an Islamic separatist rebellion in the northern Sumatran province of Aceh.

Until now, Indonesia has for the most part responded to the rebellion in habitual style: through military repression. Wahid has said he supports a degree of power sharing between the central Government and the provinces. Since he is a respected Muslim leader, analysts here say, he might have a chance of reaching an accommodation with the people of Aceh.

In a paradox that goes to the heart of the character of Wahid as well as of Indonesian Islam, it is the Islamic political parties that could pose the most troublesome challenge to the new President.

They consider him too moderate, too liberal, too tolerant of other religions and other ways of thought, too determined to separate religion from politics.

"Using religious politics is a dangerous tendency," Wahid once said. "Let the Government govern and let the religious groups take care of their own affairs."

But most analysts here are optimistic that Wahid's inclusiveness is broad enough to embrace these theological antagonists as well. Their chances for political influence were far weaker during the 32-year tenure of President Suharto, who worked hard to minimize the political clout of Islam.

The differences between Wahid's branch of Islam and more politically assertive groups have led to tensions, sharp words and even small-scale violence in the past. But they are only a matter of degree.

All subscribe to Indonesia's basic philosophy of inclusion, called Pancasila, that requires all citizens to claim a belief in God but allows them to choose equally among five religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Atheism is not permitted.

In that context, Indonesia offers the Muslim world a model quite different

from that of Middle Eastern regimes and one that is epitomized by Wahid's inclusive liberalism.

"We are very charmed by him because he can talk about civil society and liberation theology and he himself is a democrat and he loves classical music," said Olle Tornquist, a Scandinavian scholar who studies Asian societies. "He is the kind of Muslim that we in the West would all like to have."

Nasir Tamara, deputy publisher of an Islamic newspaper, *Republika*, covered the return from Paris to Iran of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 and now, 20 years later, the election of Wahid. He said the two events have nothing in common. There is no revolution here, he said; nothing fundamental will change.

He called the tolerant Indonesian model "the largest social experiment in Islamic history" and "the most important interpretation of Islam in the 20th century." At least in terms of sheer size, there is no arguing with him. More people claim Islam as their religion in Indonesia than in the entire Middle East.

India:

Indian Express
January 30, 1999

Fatwa in Thane on skirts & ties

Yogesh Pawar

MUMBAI, January 29: The Muslim clergy seems to be taking a leaf from the Hindutva brigade on attacking Christians. A fatwa issued against Christian institutions in Thane district by the Devbandi Ahle Adis community's Jamiya Asharfiya from Mubarakpur, Uttar Pradesh, has asked Christian schools in Thane to stop insisting on "ties and mini-skirts" in school uniforms with immediate effect.

The fatwa threatens: "The community will have to devise its own ways of treating this problem if the schools don't fall in line." A written communique from

the community says: "Use of such uniforms is wrong as they propagate Christianity."

The decision to send the fatwa was taken "following a complaint by United Parents' Federation (UPF)," adds the communique. UPF secretary Mohammed Iqbal, who had complained to the imams, told Express Newslite: "Ties and skirts, besides being obscene and un-Indian, are used by schools to propagate Christianity by the use of the crucifix motif on them." He alleged the local Symbiosis convent school was forcing students to wear such uniforms.

Altaf Hussain, imam of the Darul Ulum Garib Nawaz Asharfiya in Mumbra said: "This step should've been taken long ago." He said the local Asharfiya would take all steps to see the fatwa was respected and added, "I'm sure the community will be more than happy to help enforce it."

However, Kamal Raj, principal of Symbiosis convent school dismisses the "order" as a well-timed media stunt. "First of all, we're not a Christian institution. So where's the question of the crucifix?" he asks. Why is the school called convent then? "There's a craze for convent schools, and people used to send their kids all the way to Thane for schooling before we started this school in 1985. We thought it would be right to have convent in our name to attract parents. It has worked wonders."

"In Mumbra it's not unusual to come across institutions which have nothing to do with Christianity but still have Christian-sounding names. Like a school run by Dawoodi Bohras here, which is called Queen Mary school," he informed.

Of the 1,600 students in his school, he said, almost 80 per cent are Muslims. "We allow girl students in the secondary section to wear a burkha on their way to and from the school in deference to parents' wishes," he explained, adding, "In any case, most girl students wear a

salwar along with their grey ankle-length pinafores."

This hasn't stopped parents and school authorities in other schools in Thane, Dombivli and Kalyan from panicking. "The fatwa is utter madness," complained a priest who heads an institution in Kalyan. The principal of St John the Baptist in Thane expressed surprise and disbelief over the fatwa. "After all these years, during which these uniforms have been used by both Christian and non-Christian schools, who would have thought this was coming?" he asked. "Anyway it's not easy to change uniforms just like that," he said. Secretary, Archdiocesan board of education, Fr Dennis Periera, was not available for comment.

The in-charge of Mumbra police station J Gajre said he was unaware of any problem as neither the school nor the imams had informed them about the fatwa. "We will monitor the situation and take all preventive steps necessary," he said.

India:

India Today, February 15, 1999
KERALA

Fettered by Dogma With fatwas and punishments, a clutch of radical Muslim leaders holds the entire community to ransom.

By M G Radhakrishnan

* For 12-year-old Safa Mariam Ahmed and her family the celebrations ended

before they even began. Having won several prizes at the annual cultural competition at her Vocational Higher Secondary School at Payyanakkal, Kozhikode, she had just been chosen the festival's best artiste. To add to the family's delight, her elder sister Ofean also won prizes in the dance and drama competitions. Two days later came the bad news: a letter from the local Ihya-UI-Ulum Madarsa informed the two girls

that they could no more pursue Islamic studies at the madarsa. The crime: performing on stage, considered to be against Islamic tenets by the local mahal committee. Their father Ahmed Koya approached the courts for justice after his pleas for mercy were rejected. * Elsewhere in North Kerala, Tasnibanu, 20, a student of Manchery in Malappuram, wanted to marry Abdul Nasser under the Special Marriage Act instead of the traditional Islamic rites. It was then that the local masjid committee and some fundamentalist groups moved in. Banu was dismissed from her college by its Muslim management, confined to home by her father and tortured by her relatives. A worried Nasser filed a habeas corpus petition in the Kerala High Court.

Targeted by fundamentalist organisations, Tasnibanu and the Ahmed family at least looked up to the courts for justice. But in Kerala's Muslim-dominated Malappuram district and parts of Kozhikode, there are scores of others who submit to the tyranny in silence. The trend is alarming. The local masjid/mahal committees, backed by some Muslim extremist groups, have taken it upon themselves to impose Islamic law on the Muslims and punish those who are "wayward". The fundamentalist groups, led by the National Democratic Front (NDF), have particularly targeted the liberals in the community: those who do not strictly follow Islamic laws like abstaining from liquor, fasting during Ramzan and wearing the makhna or the purdah.

The consequences for those who violate these orders can be disastrous: social ostracism and even attacks and arson. "The Muslim community is being terrorised by these fundamentalists as there is a well-orchestrated attempt to Talibanise it," says S. Jabbar, district secretary of the Kerala Uktivadi Sanghom (Rationalist Association). For his outspoken views, Jabbar had to pay a price: last month, his house was attacked. Says K. Natarajan, sp, Malappuram: "The extremist groups have taken over the role of the moral police in many places."

Ahmed Koya, father of the girls expelled from their madarsa for participating in a cultural festival, says the masjid committees have been hijacked by fundamentalist bodies like the NDF. "I am a devout Muslim and do not have to be told what is Islamic by them." But the masjid committee is adamant: "It is against Islam for girls or women to perform on stage," says P.K. Mohammed, president of the Madarsathul Alaviya.

"NDF activists imposed a strict vigil on her movements and even tried to molest her."

Abdul Nasser, fiance of Tasninbanu, 20

Case: Banu dismissed from college as she wanted to marry as per the Special Marriage Act. Recourse: Nasser filed a petition in court.

The NDF, a Kozhikode-based organisation, is currently said to be in the forefront of the extremist outfits working among the Muslim community. But unlike other fundamentalist groups like the Progressive Democratic Party and the Islamic Sevak Sangh, which are virtually defunct now, the NDF functions openly and has offices in several districts. Most of its office bearers are respected professionals in various fields. Says O.M. Abdul Rahman, NDF chairman and professor at Cochin University: "We are an organisation committed to campaigning for the civil rights of the minorities and Dalits." Last year, Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar informed the state Assembly that the NDF was among the many organisations having links with extremists. According to an Intelligence Bureau (IB) official, three years after its formation in 1993, the NDF started a clandestine wing. "The overt wing organises seminars and holds adult education camps, while the covert wing is responsible for bomb attacks, stockpiling arms, training cadres and so on." It has also been charged with receiving huge donations from Gulf countries.

Most liberal Muslims, the Indian Union Muslim League, the Kerala Police and the IB concede that NDF is the main force behind the sudden increase in Muslim radicalism in the state. Police also say that some of the attacks against so-called violators of Islamic laws have been engineered by the NDF. The group has been behind the campaigns against school uniforms, singing Vande Mataram in schools and lighting of traditional lamps. "We have no evidence to show that NDF has been involved in this, but its emergence has certainly radicalised the psyche of the dissatisfied young people," say K.A. Siddique Hassan, the genial ameer (state chief) of the Jamaat-i-Islami.

"I am a devout Muslim and don't need to be told what is Islamic by them."

Ahmed Koya, father of Safa Mariam, 12 and Ofean, 14

Case: Mariam and Ofean were expelled from their madarsa for performing on stage in school. Recourse: Father moved court.

The victims too point an accusing finger at the NDF. Tasnibanu's fianc Nasser says the group was most active in Banu's persecution. "They imposed a strict vigil on her movements and also tried to physically molest her," he says. Tasnibanu also invited the extremists' ire by refusing to cover her head. But K.M. Ashraf, NDF Supreme Council member, denies NDF's involvement in the matter or in other incidents of violence against Muslims. Admitting that some NDF members were involved in the murder of godman Siddhan and in attacks on some prostitutes in Malappuram last month, Ashraf, however, says, "They acted on their own and not under our direction. Action has been taken against them."

The virtual Talibanisation of the community has, however, not elicited much response from the state's major political parties. They seem keen not to offend the Muslim groups. "The CPI(M) and the Congress want to appease the

minorities and do not dare say a word," charges Jabbar. However, Syedalikutty, the CPI(M)'s Malappuram district secretary, says, "We have been campaigning against the NDF and related extremist groups for long. But we do not want to meddle in religious and family disputes like that of Tasnibanu." When self-styled champions of a faith impinge on fundamental rights and hold an entire community to ransom, however, it's no longer a family dispute.

THE TARGETS

Fathima Suhara and her mother ostracised and prevented from drawing water from the community well in January after Fathima converted to Christianity to marry a Christian. She was back with her mother after her husband abandoned her. The two women have now moved court. Two muslim women, accused of prostitution, abducted by a mob, tonsured and paraded naked in Malappuram last month. Cases filed against members of some extremist organisations.

Godman Fakir Uppappa or Siddhan, killed in November last year for indulging in "un-Islamic spiritualism". Some NDF members arrested. Three hindu youth, killed last year for allegedly maintaining liaisons with Muslim women. No headway in the investigation. Popular reformist, the Moulvi of Chekannur, abducted by Muslim extremists some years ago, still missing. Believed to have been killed. A CBI inquiry is on.

Senior RSP leader of Kannur ordered to be socially boycotted by the local jamaat committee for videographing a wedding ceremony in the family.

Muslim homes raided during the Ramzan month to make sure every Muslim observed fast and attended the Subah namaz at the local masjid. Liquor shops in Muslim areas ransacked and Muslims caught drinking thrashed. Hindu hotels which were open during Ramzan shut down forcibly.

India: Muslim women unite to protect their rights

By A Staff Reporter

Times of India, June 10, 1999

URL:

<http://www.timesofindia.com/today/10mbom6.htm>

MUMBAI: Muslim women at a three-day national conference held here last week called for legal reforms to ensure their rights. They also demanded better implementation of the rights and provisions recognised in the Muslim Personal Law (MPL).

The conference on "Muslim Personal Law and Women", in which more than 200 women from 45 organisations all over the country participated, was organised by the non- governmental organisation Aawaaz-e-Niswaan.

Chief among the demands that emerged from the conference was a ban on the triple talaq, equal rights in cases of divorce and compulsory registration

of marriage and divorce. They pointed out that while the Muslim marriage is a contract, it is not formalised by registration but is dependent on the maulana who forms it. "Since there is no registration, the husband can even deny that a woman is his wife. It is the same with divorce. A woman has no way of knowing whether he has another wife," said one participant.

"As a minority within a minority community there is no support structure to protect our rights," said Haseena Khan, an NGO worker, pointing out that even the provisions which existed within the MPL were not implemented properly.

For example, the MPL provides for 'mehr', a sum to be given to the wife on marriage. But women at the conference noted that 'mehr' was often deferred indefinitely, or the wife was persuaded to forgo the amount. They demanded that

`mehr' be paid promptly, and if deferred for a long time must have the value addition built into the original sum.

Other demands included standardisation of the `nikah nama' (the marriage contract), equal rights regarding adoption and guardianship of the children and the right to matrimonial residence and property.

Participants also discussed issues of education and awareness among Muslim women. They noted that legal reforms must be accompanied by women's economic and educational empowerment, as well as a change in men's attitudes.

India:

Mid-day
June 11 1999

On the right track

By Jyoti Punwani

Mumbai, 11 Jun

Intellectuals from Delhi mingled with barely-literate divorcees from Mumbai's Muslim colonies last weekend at the three-day meet on Muslim Personal Law and Women, organised by Awaaz-e-Niswaan, a Muslim women's organisation working in Mumbai for almost a decade now. The result: a radical charter of demands, drawn up not by the feminists present at the conference, but thrashed out and evolved by all the participants.

Foremost among these demands:

- * A ban on unilateral triple talaq.
- * Registration of all talaqs.
- * Maintenance for divorced women beyond the iddat period.
- * Guardianship of the children to the mother, whatever her earning capacity unless she wishes otherwise.
- * No deferment in payment of mehr, which must be in a form which appreciates in value.

More radical demands were also voiced, such as the right to the matrimonial home for a divorced wife until she can support herself, or, the husband must provide a house to the divorced wife; but there was no consensus on these. No personal law provides such largesse to women, pointed out Prof Imtiaz Ahmed, the authority on Muslim Personal Law from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Muslim women need to differentiate between their struggle within Islamic concepts and their struggle for a body of secular laws, he said, which would have to be fought in the public domain along with other women.

A Jamia Milia researcher pointed to the large section of Muslims living below the poverty line, and asked how realistic were demands such as a separate house for the divorced wife.

Surprisingly, it was a middle-aged teacher who said that a divorced wife must never leave her husband's house, even if she was desperate, for she was the one who had made it into a home, and she had a right to live there with her children.

Saira (30), typifies the new Muslim woman. Barely literate, married off in her teens, she was beaten regularly by her in-laws, while her husband was in the Gulf. After he came back, he didn't intervene in the ill-treatment. By the time she had four children, he left his job. Now he lives off her, and refuses to divorce her.

I feel like I've been born again, after coming to Awaaz-e-Niswaan. I met others like me, the women working here heard me out, advised me, gave me confidence. I can now read and write Hindi. I won't ever leave this group no matter how much my husband, or the local bhailog threaten me. Obviously, what the men and the Personal Law Board dislike is the self-confidence such organisations give women who've never been given the chance to develop self-esteem. But there's no running away from it. An alternate Muslim Personal Law Board was suggested, or an all-woman jamaat which could settle disputes

presently settled, the women said, almost always in the husbands favour by the local maulvis. Instances were cited of contradictory fatwas issued by the same mufti depending on who paid him more — the boy's family or the girl's. Hence the need for codification of at least those aspects of Muslim law which relate to marriage and divorce.

Qazis too were criticised for issuing fake nikahnamas to men.

These instances were given not by activists alone, but by middle-aged mothers and grandmothers, their dupattas covering their heads, by teachers, scholars, lawyers. The Board needs to recognise that a growing section of Muslim women are not likely to be misled by the cry of 'Islam is in danger' at every reformist step, at least not when the cry is made by the Board.

Said one traditionally-dressed speaker: When a Muslim woman commits adultery, or deserts her husband, she is punished by secular laws, the same way as a Hindu woman is. At that time, the Personal Law Board sees no threat to Islam. But when a Muslim woman stands to benefit by secular laws, they get all worked up. So sisters, I have to conclude that what the Board protects is not Islam, but the male-dominated system.

Noted lawyer Vasudha Dagamwar's plea that Muslim women must come out of the private space of their personal law and enter the public space of the struggle for equal rights, found an echo in research scholar Seema Qazi's observation that all the answers could not be found in the Shariat alone.

Four schools of Muslim law emerged only because there was no agreement on what the Shariat said, she said. The Shariat is not static, but is interpreted differently in different countries.

We are a minority community, but we are also equal citizens of India and as such we must demand equal rights and laws which do not discriminate against us.

India:

Economic and Political Weekly - June 12, 1999 | Commentary

Muslim Women and Maintenance [in India]

Asgar Ali Engineer

WITH a recent judgment of the Bombay High Court the controversy over the maintenance of a Muslim divorcee has revived. A similar judgment by the Supreme Court in the mid-eighties, popularly known as the Shah Bano case, had caused much a turmoil in the Muslim community. The court had allowed a Muslim divorcee, Shah Bano, maintenance for life from her former husband under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). The Muslim leadership objected to this judgment and maintained that in Islam a divorce can get maintenance only for the 'iddat' period (i.e., a period of waiting for three months after divorce is pronounced). It thought the Supreme Court had no right to interpret the holy Qur'an - which only a Muslim 'alim' (scholar in sacred law and theology) can do.

There were massive demonstrations by Muslims, and the Rajiv Gandhi government was compelled to overturn the Supreme Court judgment by passing a new law known as the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act. The new law, drafted with the help of Muslim clergy, was supposedly based on the Qur'anic verse 2:241, which says "And the divorced women, too, shall have (a right to) maintenance in a goodly manner; this is a duty for all who are conscious of God". This verse makes it clear that the Qur'an requires Muslims who fear God to provide maintenance for their divorced wives. The 'ulema' (body of theology scholars), however, argued that this maintenance could be given only for the period of iddat.

Interestingly, while the Indian ulema and Muslim leaders agitated against the Supreme Court judgment in the mid-

eighties and forced the government of India to adopt new legislation for Muslim women, a Bangladesh court upheld in 1995 provisions analogous to Section 125 of Cr PC and allowed maintenance for life to a Muslim divorcee. In that case filed by Hefzur Rahman (Md) against Shamsun Nahar Begum the Dacca High Court delivered the judgment on January 9, 1995. The judges, Mohammad Gholam Rabbani and Syed Aminul Islam, maintained that a person after divorcing his wife "is bound to maintain her on a reasonable scale beyond the period of iddat for an indefinite period, that is to say, till she loses the status of a divorcee by remarrying another person".

The judges argued that the Qur'an was the word of God and that the word of God must prevail over the opinion of ulema. The Qur'an, the judges said, is understandable by all human beings. In the 54th 'sura' God says, "And We have made the Qur'an easy to understand and remember..." The judges also said that according to the verse 2:121 one must study the Qur'an, which is in conformity with the dynamic, progressive and universal character of Islam.

The Dacca judges then took up verse 2:241 and said there were three important words in this verse: 'mutallaqat', meaning divorcee; 'mataaon', meaning household stuff; utensils, goods, chattels, provision and convenience and 'maaroof', meaning known, recognised, honourable and good, befitting kindness. They go on to argue, "So we find that a woman who is divorced is entitled to household stuff, utensils, goods, chattels, provision, convenience which is known, recognised, honourable, good, befitting a kindness. Abdullah Yousuf Ali is, therefore, correct in translating the expression 'mataaon bil maaroof' as 'maintenance should be provided on a reasonable scale'."

The judges came to this conclusion: "Considering all the aspects, we finally hold that a person after divorcing his wife

is bound to maintain her on a reasonable scale beyond the period of iddat for an indefinite period, that is to say, till she loses the status of a divorcee by remarrying another person". This interesting interpretation of verse 2:241 seems to be quite in keeping with the words of the verse. It is also worth noting that there was no resentment of this judgment by the ulema in Bangladesh though the interpretation is not in keeping with the orthodox view.

The recent judgment of the Bombay High Court pertained to the appeal filed by Jaitunbi (Zaitunbi) Mubarak Shaikh against her former husband, who had divorced her before the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act came into force in early 1986.

The husband, Mubarak Fakhruddin Shaikh, sent her Rs 125 and three months maintenance at the rate of Rs 50 per month by money order in final settlement of the dues. The wife had filed an application for maintenance under CrPC 125, and the magistrate fixed the amount of maintenance at Rs 60 per month by an order dated June 26, 1981. But on October 6, 1986, the wife initiated the present proceedings by filing a maintenance application (no 297 of 1986) under Section 127 of the code for enhancement of maintenance, claiming that she was entitled to Rs 500 per month.

The husband in fact took a second wife and drove Jaitunbi out. Jaitunbi hailed from a very poor family, and after she was driven out she had nothing to fall back on, and her parents - quite poor - were extremely reluctant to accept her back in their home. The wife, therefore, maintained in her application for maintenance that she was ill-treated by her husband and was driven out of the matrimonial home, pursuant to which she had made an application for maintenance.

It was this application which was before the Bombay High Court, and the judges

had to decide whether she could be awarded maintenance beyond the period of iddat. As pointed out before, the purpose of the present Act, passed in 1986, was to rule out the possibility of payment of maintenance to a divorced wife beyond the period of iddat. The Indian ulema had argued then that the word 'mata' in verse 2:241 of the Qur'an is about one-time provision after divorce and not payments month after month. They also argued that marriage in Islam was a contract and that once the contract was broken the husband was not liable to maintain her - as she is free to remarry as soon as the period of iddat was over.

It was to counter the provisions of Section 125 of CrP C, which ensures maintenance for a divorced wife until she remarries or dies, that the new Act was passed in 1986. The first judgment under the Act was pronounced by Lucknow magistrate Rekha Dixit. She awarded Rs 68,000 to the divorced wife as final settlement of dues. According to the Muslim Women Act a divorcee is entitled to (1) the 'mehr' (dower) amount; (2) mata (one-time provision depending on the financial status of the husband and the standard of living the wife is used to) (3) three months maintenance; and (4) whatever gifts the estranged wife had received from husband and other relatives at the time of marriage.

The Bombay High Court bench appears to have gone beyond this. What the judges have awarded to Jaitunbi is almost what she would have been entitled to under Section 125 of the CrPC. The intention of the ulema and the Muslim leaders has been to counter Section 125 of CrPC and avoid permanent liability for the husband of a divorced wife. But the Bombay bench has through elaborate arguments of its own arrived at the conclusion that under the Muslim Women Act of 1986 she should be provided, within the iddat period, maintenance for life (or until she remarries) on a fair and reasonable scale.

The judges have discussed elaborately in their judgment: (1) the intention of the legislators in enacting this Act; (2) the contents of the Act; and (3) the meanings of the word 'maintenance' and 'provision'. They labour to prove that the fair and reasonable maintenance stipulate is in no way restricted to the iddat period.

For this they discuss Section 3(1)(a) of the Act. They point out that this clause, which deals with the rights of the children, if any, maintained by the wife, stipulates that a reasonable and fair provision is to be made for the children and maintenance is to be paid for the children by the former husband for two years from the respective dates of birth of such children. The words 'for a period of two years' specifically limit the liability of the husband against whom application is made by the divorced woman. However, Section 3(1)(a) does not stipulate that the reasonable and fair provision is to be made only for the iddat period - or for that matter, for any specific period. On the contrary, the obligation cast upon the husband in the clause is (i) to make a reasonable and fair provision for the future of the divorced wife; and (ii) to pay maintenance within the iddat period.

The judges go on to say "In our view, the making of a reasonable and fair provision has to be for the future of the divorced wife and cannot be confined to the iddat period, which is very short period as defined in Section 2(b) of the Act. Such a provision must take into account future needs, including food, shelter, clothing, medical care in old age, etc. The amount of maintenance to be paid under clause (a) however can be confined only till the iddat period expires, having regard to the scheme of Sections 3 and 4 read together."

They go on to discuss the dictionary meaning of the words 'maintenance' and 'provision' and conclude: "As far as the making of a reasonable and fair provision for the future of the divorced wife under Section 3(1)(a) of the Act (is concerned), the liability is not restricted to the iddat period having regard to the dictionary

meaning of the word 'provision'...In our view the dictionary meaning...would make it clear that the Muslim husband is required to visualise the future needs of his divorced wife and make a reasonable and fair provision for the future needs of his wife."

This judgment would be welcomed by women's organisations as a path-breaking one and undoubtedly it is that. But one must also say that it does not seem to reflect the real intention of the legislators. The Act was passed in view of agitation by the Muslim leaders and the ulema, and they were agitating precisely because Section 125 of the CrPC required the husband of a divorced wife to pay her maintenance for life or until she remarries: these leaders and the ulema argued that in Islam the liability restricted to the iddat period. The judges have so interpreted the Act with the help of a dictionary that it almost restores what the Muslim leaders and ulema had fought against.

Whatever the merit of the judgment, it must be said that more and more divorced Muslim women are going to the courts for redressal of their grievances. It is time for the ulema also to give serious thought to this problem. What jurists had believed during the medieval ages cannot be treated as final and irrevocable. All Muslim countries have brought in new legislation in respect of women's problems in keeping with modern times. We cannot shut our eyes to these problems. Though according to the 'hadith' divorce is the most disliked of the acts deemed permissible by Allah it been made very easy by the present law: any man can throw his wife out by pronouncing the word 'talaq' three times. This is causing serious problems to divorced Muslim women. Divorce should be made difficult and justiciable in the proper spirit of Islam. The law on maintenance of divorced women would also have to be reviewed so that divorced Muslim women get justice, as many Muslim countries have already done. Otherwise, the courts will intervene to do justice to aggrieved Muslim women.

India:

Outlook
(October ? 1999)
KERALA

Divorced Over Talaq Sunnis in Malappuram are divided over a ruling on a divorce case

By Venu Menon

When Muhammad Mustaffa, 26, pronounced talaq thrice to divorce 19-year-old Ramla and then changed his mind to take her back, he was little prepared for the chain reaction that his impetuous action triggered. A routine domestic squabble in Muslim-dominated Malappuram snowballed into a controversy to stir Kerala's Sunni Muslim community and it culminated in a day-long conclave of religious scholars who battled over the merits of Mustaffa's action. The meet, marked by heated exchanges between rival Sunni factions, failed to resolve the issue.

The marathon debate was called after Sunni leader Cherucheri Zainuddin Musliar, who heads the community's apex body, the Samastha Kerala Jemiyathul Ulama, issued an edict or fatwa declaring Mustaffa's talaq invalid and supporting his decision to cohabit with Ramla. The fatwa was vigorously opposed by a breakaway section of Sunnis led by Kanthapuram Aboobacker Musliar who believed the talaq was in force and demanded punitive action against Mustaffa.

Zainuddin Musliar's ruling that the talaq was invalid is disputed by the faction led by Aboobacker Musliar.

Mustaffa, a taxi-driver, also faced the wrath of the locals at Valapuram, where the incident took place. Twenty days after he beat up his wife and pronounced talaq on June 16, '98, a contrite Mustaffa brought her back home. Angry residents petitioned the qazi of the local mosque to voice their objection. The qazi ruled that Mustaffa had

violated Shariat tenets by reuniting with his divorced wife without observing stipulated procedures. Shariat laws stipulate that a woman on whom talaq has been pronounced cannot reunite with her husband until she is married to another man and subsequently divorced.

Armed with the ruling, the locals mounted pressure on Mustaffa to leave Ramla, who by then had delivered her second child. "I was dragged out of home by a mob, tied to a tree and beaten up when I refused to leave my wife," Mustaffa recalls. Social ostracism followed. His family was not allowed to draw water from the community tap. Mustaffa lost his job and no one was prepared to give him work.

Accompanied by a sympathetic neighbour who was a member of the CPI(M), Mustaffa did the rounds of all the religious heads in the area. He was rebuffed wherever he went.

The beleaguered taxi-driver finally appealed to the highest Sunni ecclesiastical authority, Zainuddin Musliar. The Sunni chief made an independent assessment and on October 21, '98, issued a fatwa invalidating Mustaffa's talaq on the ground that its pronouncement was faulty.

This spread consternation in Valapuram and beyond. To many, the ecclesiastical head of the Sunnis had legitimised Mustaffa's sacrilegious conduct. Valapuram residents went in a delegation to meet Panakkad Shihab Thangal, the iuml chief. Wary of politicising the issue, Thangal backed off from giving a ruling but counselled the delegation to abide by the ruling

of the Valapuram qazi. The iuml chief thus indirectly expressed solidarity with the lobby opposed to the fatwa.

With the qazis of local mosques against the fatwa and the iuml head sympathising with them, it became increasingly clear that only a samvad or a religious conclave could resolve the

controversy. On February 25, religious scholars met in a Malappuram auditorium to debate the issue under police supervision. The media was kept out. Both factions videotaped the proceedings as speakers invoked textual authorities and sources to buttress their argument. The rival leaders, Aboobacker Musliar and Zainuddin Musliar, stayed out of it.

The crux of the debate were the words uttered by the taxi-driver when he pronounced talaq on his wife. Zainuddin Musliar invalidated the talaq because the word "I" was missing in the talaq statement. The Kanthapuram group argued that it was not mandatory for a man to say "I" while pronouncing talaq. Each side relied on Quranic references to support its claim.

After the conclave, each faction claimed victory. Zainuddin Musliar's votaries accused their opponents of distorting the videotapes to convey a false impression of triumph. The Kanthapuram faction claimed Musliar's fatwa did not stand up to intellectual scrutiny. In the final analysis, the mammoth exercise failed to end the controversy. But even as the ideological war continues, spreading tension in the area, the ostracised taxi-driver and his wife continue to live together in a reunion fraught with risk, and under social boycott.

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India:

<http://www.indian-express.com/ie/daily/19990921/front.html>

The Indian Express

Tuesday, September 21, 1999

Op-Ed.

Do these patriarchs really care?

by Seema Alavi

There is a complete invisibility of women's issues in even the lip service

political parties pay to Muslim concerns. Political rhetoric is generally based on the assumption that the Muslim community is neither gendered nor culturally variegated. This premise informs the political construction of a community leadership which is inevitably male and located in the narrowly defined class of ulema (religious head). Thus muftis of towns and mullahs of mosques are seen as the repositories of the community's best interests and its sole spokesmen. Alongside, even though we do not have religious electorates, Muslim MPs are invariably viewed by political parties as representatives of their religious community. This was most clearly evident in the Congress government's handling of the Shah Bano case in 1986, and more recently in the demand from Muslim MPs for a quota for Muslim women within the proposed Women's Reservation Bill. In both these cases the opinion of the Muslim patriarchs received political attention even as women demonstrated against the unrepresentative character of the self-styled champions of their interests.

On Shah Bano's plea for maintenance from her ex-husband the court ruled that Muslim women fall within the purview of Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code that requires husbands with sufficient means to pay maintenance to wives or ex-wives who are unable to support themselves. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board, which has an almost negligible women representation, and a batch of Muslim MPs spearheaded a crusade against the judgment. Their opinion was taken by the then Congress government to be representative of the entire community. This resulted in the passing of the Muslim Women's Bill (1986) which removed Muslim women from Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code which ensures maintenance to all women divorcees irrespective of their religion. Once again, Muslim patriarchs

who in 1986 pushed for the passage of the retrogressive Muslim Women's Bill are demanding a quota for Muslim women within the proposed Women's Reservation Bill. This time again their demand does not derive from their concern for the Muslim women. Indeed Muslim women are apprehensive about the social implication of the quota which they fear will only complement their legal compartmentalisation ensured by the Muslim Women's Bill of 1986.

There is a mutually beneficial relationship between the politicians and the male bastions within the community. Political patronage, even if it comes sparingly, adds to the power and prestige of the religious leadership.

Why have Muslim women allowed this power game to continue for so long? To a large extent the growth of communalism has influenced the choices women have made on those issues of law and politics that affect their lives. Ever since the demand for quota for Muslims was first made in 1909-10 the consciousness of one's community identity defined in religious terms has only intensified. The partition of the country only added to this trend and the Hindutva politics of the last two decades saw its rise to its highest point. Today Muslims are more sensitive than ever about being a religious minority. For women the overbearing concern with their minority community status intersects with their gender identity.

This poses a serious dilemma for all classes of Muslim women. Their response to being used as political pawns both within and without the community is punctuated by the following concerns: Is the political timing for airing a critique in the gender imbalance in personal laws correct? Do they run the risk of providing yet another plank to the BJP? Is it fair to publicly scrutinise the juridical sphere of an already beleaguered Muslim community?

These uncertainties are revealed in the shifting and often diluted stands Muslim women groups have taken on the Uniform Civil Code. But while women have shown remarkable restraint the male-dominated community forums have used their dilemmas to structure imbalanced gender relations. What is the difference then between women living in Islamic theocratic states like Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and liberal democracies like India? Does the absence of an 'Islamic' dress code in India mean the non-existence of the power play enacted at the cost of sacrificing women's interests? One would think not.

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Iran:

The Guardian

<http://www.newsunlimited.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,129570,00.html>

Iran's female students protest at segregation Medical school sit-ins reflect growing demands for sexual equality

Geneive Abdo in Qom, Iran

Friday January 28, 2000

In a daring challenge to the Islamic system, female medical students in Iran are refusing to attend classes and are staging sit-ins in protest at their segregation from men in universities.

The students believe they receive an inferior medical education to their male peers.

One medical school in the holy Shi'ite city of Qom is for women only, and in Tehran's universities men and women must attend classes in separate rooms or sit on opposite sides of the classroom.

"We suffer because we have little interaction with our male classmates. We rarely have an exchange of ideas. There is a wall between us," said Homa, 24, a student at Tehran university's medical school.

"Many classes are for women only, and the best professors and facilities go to the men. We get the leftovers," she said.

This week a group of female medical students called upon President Mohammad Khatami and the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to reverse what they believe is sex discrimination. They have also complained to the health ministry.

Such action may not guarantee immediate change. But their public dissent adds a significant voice to a growing demand for sexual equality.

Even some reformist theologians now say that the clerical establishment has misinterpreted the Islamic texts taken as the basis for Iranian laws.

Ayatollah Yusef Sanei, a reformist cleric, ruled two months ago that women were free to run for president of the republic, and to be given more rights in cases of spousal abuse and divorce.

There is growing opposition to the inequality between the sexes that continues despite the significant gains women have made since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Today, there are more women than men in higher education, and women are increasingly seen in important positions of authority.

Women were encouraged to attend medical school after the revolution so they could treat female patients, in line with conservative readings of Islamic teachings. But these opportunities no longer satisfy women in modern Iran.

"In theory, our government says women are equal. But in practice and in our culture this is not the case," said one

woman, a 25-year-old medical student, who wished to remain unidentified.

"I know when I begin practising medicine, male doctors will always have more authority over me. It doesn't matter if I am smarter than they are or if I am a better physician."

One medical professor said sex discrimination had led to her resignation from the women-only Fatimieh medical school in Qom.

"In Islam, male doctors are allowed to treat female patients. So why should the state separate men from women in medical schools?" she asked.

"When I went to medical school 23 years ago under the shah, men and women studied together and we had no problems. To enter medical school, you have to be at the top of your class, and students are there to learn, not to flirt."

Parliament passed a law in 1998 to segregate health services to reflect conservative MPs' interpretation of Islam.

Under a pilot programme prompted by the legislation, the Fatimieh medical school in Qom, the intellectual centre for the Shi'ite Muslim clergy, dismissed all its male staff.

But experts say the quality of medical education has suffered as a result, with women students deprived of the wide range of patients and teachers they need to complete their education.

Taha Hashemi, a cleric and MP who sits on the school's board of trustees, told the daily Aftab-e Emrouz he had proposed hiring older male staff to bolster student training. "I and several other members have stopped attending board meetings in protest of the existing situation," he said.

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Iraq:

The Straits Times, January 10, 2000

Vigilantes target couples at lovers' lane

BAGHDAD — Police have arrested a group of religious vigilantes who allegedly stalked and killed 19 men who were with their girlfriends at a tree-lined esplanade frequented by lovers, a magazine reported.

The killings started in October, when a college student was slain as he chatted with his girlfriend, the *Ishtar* monthly magazine reported.

It said the killers approached the victim and fired one bullet in his head. The girl was not harmed.

Police did not publicise the killing, and other lovers continued to visit the promenade along the Tigris River in northern Baghdad.

At least 18 more men were killed in a similar fashion before police launched an undercover operation.

The killers apparently saw themselves as Islamic vigilantes offended by the lovers' actions, the magazine reported. Conservative Muslims say Islam does not allow premarital association between men and women.

One police officer, speaking on condition of anonymity, said four men had been arrested but police would not give any other details.

The magazine said the men were caught by undercover policemen, one who was dressed in women's clothes. Both officers were heavily armed and pounced on the men before they could act.

Another police officer, Major Adnan Auda, worked on the case earlier and walked on the promenade several times with a girl as part of the undercover operation.

During one such operation, Maj Auda was overpowered by two men who held him at gunpoint. But they let him go after a warning.

After the four men were arrested in the latest undercover operation, Maj Auda identified them as the same men who attacked him, the magazine reported.

It said that despite the arrests, lovers have been hesitant to return to the promenade.
— AP

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Kuwait:

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Website:

<http://www.informationtimes.com>

Row over Women's Right to Vote in Kuwait

by Abdus Sattar Ghazali

KUWAIT CITY, Kuwait - May 19, 1999 (Information Times): Islamic movements are up in arms over a government decision to grant women the right to vote and contest in elections. They claim the decision violates Islam and the country's Constitution and will disrupt the Kuwaiti society.

Abdul Razzak Al Shayeji, a prominent member of the Al Salaf movement said the decision was aimed at splitting the opposition and changing the agenda of election candidates. He said the Amiri decree was also aimed at painting a prettier picture of Kuwait to the Western world "to make it look like we're furthering democracy".

Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, dissolved the Parliament on May 4 and ordered fresh elections for July 3.

Al Shayeji believes the decision to grant women their full political rights "should have been left to the people..It is a violation of the Constitution because it isn't an urgent matter that requires a decree during the absence of Parliament".

He criticized liberal movements for immediately supporting Sunday's decision, saying "this shows a lack of political stance towards an issue which violates the Constitution. This is not an urgent issue."

Former Islamist MP Mubarak Al Duwailah said the decision would not pass through the next National Assembly when voted during the first sitting. Any decree issued during Parliament's absence requires approval of the next assembly by a two thirds majority. Al Duwailah said his Islamic Constitutional Movement supports the right of vote for women but not a right to contest elections.

Former MP Waleed Al Tabtabai said Kuwait should not follow the example of other Islamic nations like Pakistan — where Benazir Bhutto proved a failure, Jordan — which has only one woman MP and Egypt, where women are not in Parliament.

He said: "Even foreign nations like France took 200 years to allow women to vote and Switzerland gave women voting rights only in 1973". He opined that better alternatives to enlarge the vote base was to allow military men and youth above 18 to vote.

Currently, about 113,000 Kuwaitis above the age of 21 are allowed to vote. The number of voters would double to 250,000 if the women were also allowed to vote in 2003.

The National Democratic Movement (NDM) Secretary General Ahmed Bishara expressed hope that the decision would "stifle the Islamists trend that has been on

going for several years to control women and curtail their activities.”

Kuwaiti women have failed in their numerous attempts to win the right to vote that is allowed by the Constitution but forbidden by the Elections Law, 1962. A Fatwa from the Al Azhar University, which supported full political rights for women, did nothing to sway the dissolved Parliament to approve the two bills on women's right to vote.

Candidates in the forthcoming parliamentary elections have voiced opposing views on granting women political rights. Even some of the politicians who back the right to vote oppose them standing for public office.

Kuwaiti women slightly outnumber their men in a population of about 790,000. They are the majority of students at the Kuwait University forming over 60 percent. They have even reserved seats for men in certain colleges due to the fact that they outnumber their male counterparts in almost every college.

[Abdus Sattar Ghazali is Kuwait Bureau Chief of the Information Times.]

Lebanon:

Middle East International
No. 610, 15 Octobre 1999
Lebanon:

Satanic verses

from Jim Quilty

Beirut

At times it seems, Lebanon's judicial system aspires to be even more baffling than its political counterpart. A case in point is the storm which has blown up around composer and performer Marcel Khalifa. Though officially a judicial mater, it has highlighted the nuanced factional divide that exists here, not only between the secularist intelligentsia and the bastions of institutional sectarianism, but among

different elements of the Muslim religious elite as well.

A leftist who has long been a staunch opponent of sectarianism and advocate of Palestinian rights, Khalifa is easily one of the best loved artists in this country and the wider Arab world. In 1995, he released an album which featured his setting of a poem by Mahmud Darwish. The poem, widely available in Lebanon since its publication in 1992, alludes to the chapter in the Qur'an called Yusuf (Joseph, in the Bible) in a manner which highlights the element of betrayal in the plight of the Palestinians.

It was in 1996 that the song first got Khalifa into trouble with the judicial authorities. Lebanon's Sunni Mufti, Shakh Muhammad Rashid Qabbani, took exception to the song because at one point it - or rather the Darwish poem - quotes the Qur'an directly. To do so in a popular song was deemed to be blasphemous by the Mufti. At that time the composer very nearly faced charges. But the outrage among the country's intellectual community was sufficient to embarrass then Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri into having the case suffocated. Hariri - whose public relations motto at the time was "Everything's working!" - had good reason to put pressure on the judiciary. He also had the means to silence Qabbani, since he had been personally responsible for having the shaykh installed as doyen of the Sunni community.

Years passed, governments came and went and, in the interim, Shaykh Qabbani distinguished himself with vocal stands against a number of causes that threatened the sanctity of Lebanon's sectarian establishment. He rallied his Christian, Shi'ite and Druze counterparts against the proposed introduction of civil marriage, and to lobby for the reinstatement of religious education in state schools.

Most recently, he spoke out against the resettlement of the country's Palestinian refugee population which, he pointed out, would upset the country's sectarian balance. The Mufti's stand might seem

less altruistic if one considers that, though predominantly Sunni, the Palestinians are living in such deplorable conditions (and are such likely candidates for further radicalisation) that the greatest challenge they would pose within Lebanon's reconstituted sectarian system would be to the Sunni leadership itself.

In the meantime, it seems the judiciary never forgot about Khalifa's supposed blasphemy. So on 1 October, a day after the start of the new judicial year, the musician was informed by Beirut's chief investigating magistrate, Abd al-Rahman Shihab, that he was being indicted on charges of insulting Islam. Asked why the case had been reopened, Shihab simply said the original indictment could not be held in abeyance forever. If convicted, Khalifa faces up to three years in jail.

Timed as it is - amid the Lahoud regime's judicial probes against protégés of the Hariri administration and recent allegations that the arrest of one of them, ex-oil minister Shahe Barsoumian (MEI 597), was illegal - the case might have provided the opposition with a cause célèbre. But for all the moral disapproval, few other than Druze leader Walid Jumblatt have tried to make political capital out of it. Cicumspect Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss merely expressed confidence that the judiciary could be trusted to be fair. Hariri, Shaykh Qabbani's political patron, has been silent on the matter.

Evidence suggests that Qabbani is the real force behind the indictment's resurrection. It was he who pointed out a recent ruling by jurists at Al-Azhar in Cairo forbidding any musical rendition of the Qur'an. Furthermore, Shihab, a Sunni Muslim, reopened the investigation just two days after being appointed to his post. His appointment was a result of efforts on the part of the Mufti, who intervened on Shihab's behalf when he discovered there were no Sunnis among Beirut's investigating magistrates.

In the week after the case was revived, Qabbani was the only religious figure to applaud the indictment - the only one, in

fact, to support the contention that Khalifa's song violated Islamic law. Muhammad al-Amin, a prominent jurist in the Shi'ite religious court, pointed out that for centuries the Qur'an has provided inspiration for Arabic poetry which has not been considered blasphemous. The spiritual leader of Hizbullah, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, commented that "the musical performance of poetry which includes Qur'anic verses does not offend the Qur'an's sanctity if it deals with humanitarian concerns".

Support for Khalifa

Support for Khalifa within political and intellectual circles grew, and it seemed the resurrected charges against him would go the way of the original indictment.

Then, a week after the indictment was revived, Qabbani's Shi'ite counterpart, Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, entered the fray. He declared Khalifa's song a violation of Islamic law, but said the composer should not be tried for it. It was not, he said, the place of religious scholars to interfere in the operation of the state's judicial system.

Khalifa's response has been fairly consistent. He welcomed Shams al-Din's ruling but insisted: "I did not put to music a Qur'anic verse. I put to music a poem that deals with the plight of the Palestinian people." For this part the real culprit, Mahmud Darwish, warned that "fundamentalism is increasingly stifling culture and creativity in the Arab world. If Marcel Khalifa is found guilty, it will be an insult to culture".

It is difficult to place the blasphemy charges within the trajectory of Lebanese politics. The case is of no obvious benefit to any of the country's managers. Although it does suggest that the judicial system is a pliable tool in personal vendettas, a point which it would obviously benefit Hariri to highlight, the fact that it was pressed by one of his clients makes it difficult to ascribe the case to the billionaire's machinations.

Attributing complete responsibility to Qabbani lends the affair a strangely ana-

chronistic air. The Mufti using his position to pursue a matter of conservative principle - on which there isn't even agreement among Muslim jurists - against a well loved Christian artist runs the risk of discrediting the sectarianism that sustains him.

Most striking has been the defence of Khalifa. The case has mobilised Lebanon's intelligentsia and thrust them into the media spotlight, while the political bosses have remained largely quiescent, even polite. This in itself is enough to suggest that a more significant story lies hidden elsewhere.

Lebanon:

International Herald Tribune
Paris, Tuesday, November 30, 1999
<http://www.ihf.com/IHT/TODAY/TUE/IN/beirut.2.html>

Lyric From the Koran Is Off-Key in Lebanon Arab World Star Faces Trial for Blasphemy

By Lee Hockstader Washington Post Service

BEIRUT - When he goes on trial for blasphemy in Lebanon this week, Marcel Khalife, one of the Arab world's best-loved singer-songwriters, is prepared to give the court an earful - whether or not he is sentenced to prison.

"I'm going to ask them, 'What am I doing here?'" said Mr. Khalife, who stands accused of offending Islam by singing a brief verse from the Koran.

"I'm culturally ashamed," he continued. "I think it's an ethical scandal that I'm here. Are we moving forward and building a happy future or are we stuck in the past?"

Soft-spoken, impish, a veteran of concert halls and recording studios in the United States, Europe, the Middle East and North

Africa, Mr. Khalife, 48, seems an unlikely blasphemer.

Politically, he is prone to a gauzy, love-thy-neighbor brand of liberalism. Religiously, although he was raised in a Christian family, he considers himself to be devoutly secular. He lived in Muslim West Beirut through much of Lebanon's long civil war. His compact disks, on sale throughout the world, are hugely popular and 90 percent of the buyers are Muslims, he says.

Mr. Khalife is a cultural icon in Lebanon, which prides itself on an openness and avant-garde spirit that sets it apart from most Arab countries.

Despite the devastation of a 15-year civil war that ended in 1990, Beirutis think of their city as the cultural capital of the Arab world, and point to outspoken intellectuals and a slightly decadent nightlife as proof.

None of that carried much weight with the Sunni Muslim hierarchy or with the new chief magistrate of Beirut, Abdel Rahman Shehab. A day after he took office last month, Mr. Shehab, a Sunni, indicted Mr. Khalife on charges of committing a crime against the country's dominant religion, Islam.

If found guilty, Mr. Khalife faces a prison term of six months to three years. The trial is scheduled to begin Wednesday.

His offense was to set to music a poem, "Oh, Father, It Is I, Youssef," which contains at its end a verse from the Koran. The poem, by the renowned Palestinian writer Mahmoud Darwish, is a bitter lament that gives voice to the Koranic prophet Youssef (the Old Testament figure Joseph), whose brothers hated him and plotted to kill him. In the plaintive last stanza, Youssef asks if he wronged his brothers by telling them of his dream:

"I dreamed of 11 planets
And of the sun and the moon
All kneeling before me."

That stanza angered the Dar Fatwa, the senior Sunni religious authority in Lebanon. Quoting from the Koran is fine, the clerics said, but setting its verses to music and accompanying it with instruments is off-limits.

"When you include a musical instrument to accompany the Koran, you go beyond the respect due the word of God on earth," said Mohammed Kabaneh, the grand mufti.

"There are rules that must be respected. This issue has nothing to do with freedom. An artist can use the words written by people as he wishes, but he doesn't have the right to use the word of God."

The prosecution of Mr. Khalife is actually an encore performance. His song, first released in 1995, attracted attention almost immediately. But an indictment against him two years ago was dropped, reportedly at the prompting of the prime minister at the time, Rafiq Hariri.

Following the recent indictment, sales of the CD containing the offending song, "Arabic Coffeepot," have soared. Several thousand of Mr. Khalife's fans and allies have signed petitions on his behalf and demonstrated their support at a pretrial hearing early this month. Mr. Darwish, the Palestinian writer whose poem Mr. Khalife adapted to music, appeared in Lebanon to perform with Mr. Khalife and embrace him. Abroad, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other groups have expressed their concern publicly.

Rattled by all the clamor, Mr. Kabaneh, the Sunni mufti, barely consents now to discuss the case. When a visitor pressed him the other day on whether he objects only to Mr. Khalife's song or to popular music in general, he threatened to cut the conversation short.

"You don't seem to be aware of the high responsibilities of the mufti of the republic," he said. "We consider the matter closed."

Lebanon's cultural elite is not so willing to let it drop. Intellectuals in Beirut say the Khalife case fits an ominous pattern of recent attacks on artistic expression. They say they fear that Lebanon's status as one of the more tolerant societies in the Arab world could suffer if the balance tips toward Islamic fundamentalists.

A few weeks ago, Lebanese authorities censored a performance of modern ballet, singling out a scene in which women danced around men at prayer as "indecent" and offensive to Islam. A recent sculpture exhibit generated a similar furor.

"Until now, Lebanon has had the most open freedom of expression in the Arab world," said Tewfik Mishlawi, a Lebanese journalist and political analyst. "Here there is a different balance of forces than in most Arab countries. The liberals are much stronger. But there are worrying signs."

Malaysia:

AsiaNow - Asiaweek
November 5, 1999 VOL. 25 NO. 44(<http://cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/magazine/99/1105/as.health.aids2.html>)

A Spirited Response Malaysia's AIDS activists woo Muslim clerics

By Santha Oorjitham Kuala Lumpur

Call it an article of faith. When a group of Islamic clerics, scholars, lawyers, government officials and activists emerged from their meeting in May, they noted that AIDS had become an epidemic in Malaysia. The solution, they decided, lay in education - for everyone, including religious officials and pre-teens. Beyond that, the group called on the community to be caring toward sufferers. That, they declared, is the way of Islam.

"It's very forward-thinking," activist Joe Selvaretnam says of the resolution from the meeting. At issue is the Islamic establishment's response to AIDS in

predominantly Muslim Malaysia. The religious officials recognized that they could do a lot to halt the epidemic. (More than 30,000 Malaysians are infected and another 2,800 have developed symptoms.) "The leaders recognize they have a frontline role in prevention: equipping people with spiritual values and teaching everyone compassion," says Selvaretnam, a member of the Malaysian AIDS Council headed by the premier's daughter, Marina Mahathir.

Mildly worded as it is, the resolution nonetheless challenges the orthodoxy in some Islamic circles where AIDS is regarded as a "manifestation of God's punishment." This unbending view makes some Muslim sufferers afraid to approach religious bodies, says Khartini Slamah, who volunteers at a community center offering support to AIDS patients. "Their past life is held against them, and requests for help may be rejected. They turn to religion but are turned away."

Fatimah knows from painful experience. After she and her husband tested HIV-positive two years ago, they were evicted from their rented home, with a baby in tow. Soon Fatimah lost her job too. But when she sought help from a religious agency, the reply was "we don't entertain people like you here." Personal accounts from people such as Fatimah moved the Muslim leaders to take a more pro-active stance. And activists hope an international AIDS conference underway in Kuala Lumpur will add momentum to their prevention program. True, the muftis, or religious advisers, reached consensus on the need to "reduce harm." But still they had to get individual state authorities to back their call for full information about prevention, from urging abstinence and marital fidelity to promoting the use of condoms.

The last method is a potential problem since religious officials forbid sex outside marriage. Certainly, proposals for condom distribution and a needle-exchange program for drug users are

drawing flak. Dr. Ishak Mas'ud of the Muslim youth movement ABIM attacks such plans as "promoting drug addiction and promiscuity." Not true, say activists. Selvaretnam points instead to declining HIV infections after needle-exchange was introduced in the West.

Still, activists are making headway. An invitation from Islamic officials to set up an information booth at a K.L. mosque is one example. "A milestone," says Selvaretnam. Next on the AIDS council wish list: a project to raise awareness in state religious departments. And they have just the tool: AIDS Education Through Imams. The booklet was produced for a Uganda program which trained prayer leaders to reach out to families. The council hopes to replicate this in Malaysia, eventually tying in Friday sermons and counseling for engaged couples. Faith, they say, works wonders.

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Source: IPS Gender and Human Rights Bulletin, 29 November, 1999

Malaysia: Women Wary in 'Most Islamic' States

By R Mageswary

KOTA BAHRU, Malaysia, Nov 23 (IPS) - Dressed in black from head to foot, a young woman scurries across the main street in the capital of Kelantan state, with her eyes the only parts of her body visible to an onlooker. Just a few feet away, another young woman walks hand in hand with a male friend, her thick glossy hair uncovered, and she garbed in a shirt and denims.

Like most other places in Malaysia, Kelantan has a healthy mix of modern and conservative Muslim women. But since this north-eastern state came under the rule of the Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS) in 1990, there has been no shortage in predictions that Kelantan

would become as ultraconservative as the organisation that holds sway over it, and that the state's women may have to deal with more restrictions in daily life.

So far, none of the predictions have come true. But some women here say they sometimes feel the pressure to act according to certain norms that are perceived to be Islamic. One woman born and bred in Kelantan says, for example, that while wearing a veil is not compulsory here, there is pressure on the Muslim women to do so.

PAS officials have also banned beauty contests and bodybuilding competitions in Kelantan, declaring these un-Islamic. It has separate supermarket check-outs for women and men.

Kelantan is the only one among Malaysia's 13 states in which PAS is the ruling party. PAS, which holds a minority eight seats in Parliament, makes no secret that its goal is to establish an Islamic state. This is despite the fact that its two main allies in the opposition Alternative Front do not share the same aim. In fact, some critics cite this as a sign that the opposition coalition's unity is tenuous. Why it won here in Kelantan is largely due to the fact that this state, whose capital is about a hour by plane from Kuala Lumpur, has always been more "Islamic" than the rest of Malaysia. (PAS also led Kelantan in 1959 to 1978.)

But many locals at that time were also concerned with what they call the growing social and moral decay, and they apparently saw an antidote of sorts in the simple lifestyle of PAS leader Nik Aziz. In the ongoing election campaign ahead of the Nov 29 election, Kelantan has become a keenly watched state.

Critics say the ruling National Front, led by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, has been trying to cultivate fear of a government with major PAS influence and feeding the unease already felt by many Muslims about the Islamic party.

The opposition parties are fielding common candidates for Parliament under the Alternative Front, and many of these are from PAS, the other parties being the

mainly Chinese Democratic Action Party and the National Justice Party led by the wife of former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim. Likewise, PAS is mounting an aggressive campaign to wrest neighbouring Terengganu, one of Malaysia's poorest states despite its petroleum and natural gas resources, from the rule of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which leads the National Front. PAS is seeking to gain more support by taking advantage of a split in the ranks of Malays, who have traditionally been UMNO's power base, in the light of the government's arrest and conviction of Anwar for corruption, which he says is part of a high-level conspiracy to oust him. So far, PAS leaders have not limited the women in Kelantan from working. But Mirwais Khan, an expert on Islamic law, points out that allowing women to work should not be used as a yardstick to measure just how much freedom women actually enjoy.

While women work in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, for instance, they do not enjoy many rights, Khan says. Among other things, Saudi women are not allowed to drive and have inferior property rights. Afghan women cannot leave their homes without a male relative accompanying them, and can only do so garbed in a thick 'chador', black gloves and stockings, even in sweltering heat.

Kelantan women, for their part, say they cannot see themselves not working. Says a representative from the Sisters of Islam, a non-government organisation (NGO) working for the betterment of Muslim women: "Kelantan women have been liberated for centuries. Even the British were surprised to see them as breadwinners rather than housewives." Indeed, women here are much a part of the workforce as those in other parts of the country, with many women entrepreneurs practically monopolising many market sectors in this still predominantly rural state. But Subkhy Latif of PAS says, "Working women must behave and must not mix freely with men. They must dress properly according to Islamic customs.

We also discourage the use of lipsticks and nail polish because apart from seducing men, they also tarnish the original beauty (of women)." In PAS' political rallies alone, the party has separate seating areas for women and men. And while women are allowed membership in the party, they are not allowed to stand as candidates in elections because then they would have to mix with the opposite sex. This is despite the fact that women make up half of PAS's 700,000 members, admits Latif. Likewise, he adds that three women have been appointed to the party's Central Working Committee. Some say the problem is that PAS seems to confuse Islam with Arab culture. This concerns people like the Sisters of Islam member who declined to be named. "For example, male dominance is an Arab culture and not an Islamic culture," she says. "Islam is intended to liberate women." While PAS has not attempted to put too many restrictions on women here, observers worry that there is no guarantee that it will continue to do so in the future—especially if it gains more clout nationwide. But while PAS' clout would seem to be boosted by its key participation in the anti-Mahathir opposition, it will be no easy task it to boost its parliamentary presence from the mere eight seats it now has. And even if it wins, putting up an Islamic state would have to mean amending the Malaysian Constitution which guarantees freedom of religion. (END/IPS/RM/ap-ip-hd/ccb/js/99)

The Straits Times Interactive: Asia - Malaysia Status:
March 21, 2000
(http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/asia/mal1_0321.html)

Malaysia: Fined for not wearing headscarves

KUALA LUMPUR — Authorities in Kelantan, ruled by Malaysia's PAS Islamic

party, have fined 23 Muslim women workers for not wearing the tudung or headscarves in public places, a state government official said yesterday.

"The action taken is to remind everyone that Islamic dress-code rules are still being enforced in the state," said Mr Ahmad Yakob, an executive council member of the north-eastern state's government.

Kelantan has been ruled since 1990 by the Parti Islam (PAS), which last November also captured neighbouring Terengganu and tripled its seats in the federal parliament to 27.

Mr Ahmad told AFP the women workers were fined RM30 (\$13) each by the local municipal authority, which enforces the rules.

Separately, the Trengganu government announced yesterday that like Kelantan, it will also introduce a dress code which will require Muslim women to wear the tudung and to cover their bodies, except for their hands and faces.

In the first stage of implementation, the state government will educate Muslim women about the move.

The proposed regulations will be similar to those introduced by Kelantan in 1995. The ruling, which carries a maximum fine of RM250, applies to workers both in the government and private sectors.

Kelantan also bars non-Muslim female workers from wearing mini-skirts or dresses which expose their figures.

In the latest cases, the 23 women fined were working without headscarves at several food stalls and video-rental outlets around Kota Baru, the state capital.

Mr Ahmad denied that the action was part of a crackdown.

"This is not something we do all the time, but periodic checks are necessary to uphold the image of Islam in the state," he said.

All municipal councils in the state, he added, had the discretion to decide on the timing of such checks.

"We have had no complaints from the people so far.

"After all, what we are doing is merely asking the public to dress responsibly," he said.

He said that so far, no non-Muslim had flouted the ruling, "and we are thankful for their cooperation".

The dress code was one of several measures introduced by PAS to implement an Islamic administration in Kelantan.

Local authorities also banned unisex hairdressing salons and massage parlours. Supermarkets had to install separate counters for men and women.

There are separate seating arrangements for all public functions. — AFP, The Star/Asia News Network

South China Morning Post
Thursday, March 23, 2000

Malaysia: Women unite against enforced dress code

Ian Stewart in Kuala Lumpur

The imposition of a dress code for Muslim women in Terengganu, the eastern state won by the opposition Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS) in the last election, has sparked feminine outrage across the Malaysian political spectrum.

A women's organisation, Sisters in Islam, said the Koran did not clearly stipulate any specific form of dress. It added that imposing laws and regulations did not necessarily lead to more piety.

The ruling even resulted in two prominent women who are normally at loggerheads taking a similar stand on the issue.

Rafidah Aziz, the Minister of International Trade and Industry, said the move ignored the right of individuals.

Wan Azizah Ismail, president of the opposition National Justice Party, said wearing the tudung - wrap-around head-gear which is now a must in Terengganu - was a woman's choice.

The second state to fall into the hands of PAS, Terengganu announced that women would have to wear the tudung and cover all other parts of their bodies except their hands.

A similar dress code was applied in Kelantan in 1995, five years after PAS took control of that state. On Monday, a Kelantan official said 23 Muslim women had been fined M\$30 (HK\$62) each for not wearing the tudung in public.

The common stand of Ms Rafidah and Dr Azizah on the new dress code contrasts with their opposing attitudes on most other matters. Ms Rafidah is a rapid-fire and forceful speaker, while Dr Azizah speaks softly and hesitantly.

Dr Azizah always wears the tudung in public. The minister seldom wears even a head scarf.

But the women are diametrically opposed on the subject of Anwar Ibrahim, former deputy prime minister and Dr Azizah's husband. He is an old political foe of Ms Rafidah, who backs the Government over Anwar's sacking and jailing for corruption.

However, Ms Rafidah took a swipe at Terengganu's rulers, saying they should not make laws just to satisfy PAS leaders.

Dr Azizah, whose party formed an opposition alliance with PAS for the election, said simply: "There is no compulsion in religion.

"One should be wise in how to implement [the Terengganu ruling]."

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Morocco:

The Independent, London,
February 3, 2000

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/World/Africa/2000-02/morocco030200.shtml>

Fury as 'King M-6' reforms status of Moroccan women

By Rupert Cornwell

3 February 2000

A rise in the legal age of marriage from 15 to 18; polygamy only with the permission of a man's first wife; an equal right to divorce, and a fair

division of assets between the parties. What could sound more reasonable? In Morocco, these notions are enough to have wise men warning of civil war. January 2000 will go down as when the new Moroccan revolution woke up to reality. It was when Islamic activists shouted down ministers in the capital, Rabat, and when a government plan to haul the treatment of women

>from the Middle Ages to somewhere near the 21st century became the litmus

test of King Mohammed VI's ambitions for his country. This was the month one of the most stable Arab countries became a battleground between modernisers and the forces of conservative Islam. Little was expected from a shy and untested crown prince, when he succeeded King Hassan II last July. But "M-6" has transformed the mood of his country. He allowed the return from exile of Abraham Serfaty, the country's most prominent dissident and erstwhile political prisoner, and then sacked his father's dreaded Interior Minister, Drissi Basri. He has twice travelled to the desperately poor Rif region, the largest source of cannabis for Europe, within which Hassan II never set foot in 38 years on the throne. On the Western Sahara dispute, which has weighed on Moroccan international relations for a quarter of a century, the King hints at a new flexibility.

Unprecedented in the Arab world, he has launched a commission to examine human rights abuses. Thus far, the King has governed by dramatic gesture. But the clash with militant Islam over women's emancipation will be a first, perhaps decisive challenge. The Prime Minister, Abderrahmane El Yousoufi, warned: "If this fails the whole reform project fails." Morocco's Islamists are a minority, but a determined one. They have the backing of conservatives in Mr Yousoufi's eight-party coalition, and a natural recruiting ground in the mosques and universities. The ingredients that have stoked Islamic movements elsewhere are only too visible here: massive unemployment, \$19bn (£12.5bn) of foreign debt whose mere servicing consumes one-third of the annual budget, rampant corruption and vast disparities between a tiny, super-wealthy elite and masses who live in grinding poverty.

The illiteracy rate is 50 per cent; as many live on £1 a day or less. Among women in the countryside, deprived of schooling, jobs and basic legal rights, those figures rise to 80 per cent or more. The Islamists claim emancipation of women would lead to the collapse of the family, destruction of Islamic values and debauchery of every sort. The government is not sure of victory. Hamstrung by differences within its own ranks, it has not dared challenge to the Islamists head-on. All roads lead back to the King, change's best guarantee. The youth of Mohammed VI – he is 36 – could be a vital asset in a country where half the population is under 25.

But not only does he wield vast temporal powers in his semi-feudal kingdom. He is also Morocco's supreme religious authority: directly descended from the Prophet, and such a man religious activists will take on at their peril. To show commitment to Islam, the King has grown a beard since he ascended the throne.

Unlike his father, who survived at least two attempted military coups against him, the

King so far has the full loyalty of the army and the police: without it, he could never last. But the plan to help women will be his sternest test. "I am not exaggerating," insists Mr Serfaty. "This is capable of leading us into civil war."

Somaila:

New York Times
November 29, 1999
Hargeisa Journal

A Somali Woman of Firsts and Her Latest Feat: A Hospital

By Ian Fisher

ARGEISA, Somalia — "I'm a crazy old woman," Edna Adan Ismail said only a minute or two after introducing herself. "You might as well know that from the start."

If that must be one's fate, one might as well do it as Ms. Ismail has. She looks wonderful, to begin with — a queenly woman of 62, beautiful in her gold Ghanaian gown and head wrap.

She clearly tries to be humble, but still the superlatives of her life spill out. First woman in Somalia with Western nursing training. First woman in Somalia with a driver's license. First woman of Somalia, period, because she was the first wife of Mohammed Ibrahim Egal, prime minister of Somalia from 1967 to 1969.

(She shows off some photos of President Lyndon B. Johnson, in a tuxedo, towering over all 5 feet 2 inches of her at a White House dinner. "Oh, he was great fun," Ms. Ismail said.)

She broke a lot more ground in Somalia, and at the moment she is vying for a new title, noble but frustrating: first woman — no, first person — in Somalia to build a maternity hospital for poor women, using her own money and not getting much help.

The hospital is going up in a place most people in the world would avoid: in the

poorest part of Hargeisa, a big city in what some people see as the former Somalia, a place with no central government and one of the highest rates of infant mortality.

The hospital site itself was once a military training ground under the sometimes-socialist rule of Mohammed Siad Barre. He overthrew Egal in 1969 and remained in power until 1991.

"If someone had a very strong urge to quote Marx, Lenin or Engels, this is where you did it," she said. "And if, after you were done saluting, you had an urge to kill someone, this is where you did it."

In the last two years, she says, she has poured about \$300,000 of her savings into the "monster," as she calls it: 31,500 square feet of raw concrete, which she hopes will someday become the hospital's birthing rooms, surgical theater and library.

She is, by Somali standards, a rich woman.

A British-trained maternity nurse, she had a long career in the United Nations and retired two years ago as the World Health Organization's representative in Djibouti.

But her money is running out. And finishing the hospital is turning out to be difficult.

Some fans of Ms. Ismail say that the problems of her hospital are a likely symbol for the problems of the place where it located: in the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland, which declared independence from the rest of Somalia in 1991.

Egal now leads Somaliland, and they are still friends. "We've both matured," said Ms. Ismail, now widowed by the death of her third husband.

Somaliland has accomplished much since then — peace and the very first stirrings of prosperity — even though it receives little international help, largely because it has not been recognized by any outside powers as a nation.

Ms. Ismail has managed to raise her hospital three stories high, receiving from international groups, she says, only four wheelbarrows, three buckets, four picks and a wheelchair from Greece, still in bubble wrap.

Somaliland has been trying to convince international aid programs that it needs help to build on what it has accomplished.

In the case of her hospital, Ms. Ismail says, she could finish the job in only a few months if she had \$150,000.

But neither Ms. Ismail nor her potential nation seems likely to get much help soon. Ms. Ismail says the reasons are similar in both cases: "They are suspicious of Somalis."

The notion of "donor fatigue" — a drop in aid money when the donors feel that little is being accomplished — gained currency after the United Nations fled Somalia in 1994 after trying to help people suffering from civil war and famine, but leaving the nation no closer to stability.

Many outside nations, including Somalia's neighbors, also hope that Somalia may reunite, and no one wants to help Somaliland too much until that happens or the dream dies.

"Everybody who comes to Hargeisa visits my hospital," Ms. Ismail said. "They come. They cry. They go."

"They are giving us lip service. People coming here shed tears but when it comes to help, it doesn't come."

Dr. Romanus N. S. Mkerenga, the local Unicef representative, said it is nothing personal, at least as far as his agency is concerned. His agency is likely to donate equipment and even put the hospital under contract to provide medical services once it is finished, he said, but it has no funds for construction.

"It's not our mandate," he said. "We don't do buildings in any of our projects."

Another United Nations official said there is some doubt about the project itself: that it is simply too ambitious.

Ms. Ismail would not dispute the ambitious part.

"I am an ambitious old woman," she said as she tromped around the construction site on a recent afternoon. Sometimes the word "crazy" slips out to describe the vision of her hospital.

She wanted at first to open only a hospital for mothers and babies, which might have meant a modest, one-story building.

But there are few nurses in Somaliland. So she decided she would have to open a school in the hospital to train nurses.

That means teachers. Teachers mean classrooms and books. Teachers and student nurses need a place to live, so that means dormitories.

And when her own money runs out, the place will still need money. So that means the small cluster of shops she is building around the hospital's periphery, which will pay rent.

To save more money, she is building herself an apartment in the hospital — with a view of Hargeisa, including the deranged man who lives in a rusted truck cab a few empty lots over.

With help or not, she is determined to finish the hospital sooner rather than later. Ms. Ismail, who delivered her first baby in 1960, wants to be spry enough to teach. She seems determined to do it, too, with a measure of humor, evident in at least every other sentence of her perfectly idiomatic English.

She likes, for instance, the word "bingo," as in: "Bingo! My 1992 P.C.!", which she exclaims while pulling back a dust cover to reveal a diplodocus of a computer with a cracked screen, donated by a friend. Or: "Bingo! They are making bread! We have light!" to explain that the only electricity the hospital has at the

moment comes, erratically, from the bakery down the street.

She may, too, be the first woman in Somalia to boss around so many men — the masons and other builders, who take a pledge not to fight or chew khat, a mildly narcotic leaf popular in Somalia, while working for her. She has, by necessity, also become an expert in the male-dominated art of construction.

"I've learned so much," she said. "In my next reincarnation, I think I will become a mason."

Sudan: Sudan To Require Islamic Attire For All Women

05:19 a.m. Jan 05, 1999 Eastern

By Alfred Taban

KHARTOUM (Reuters) - Sudan has imposed a new dress code on women requiring them to wear Islamic attire and a headscarf and will deploy public order police to ensure that it is observed, the official news agency SUNA said

Tuesday.

It said the decision was taken by the Public Order and Appearance Committee, set up to ensure behavior conforms with Islamic law which took effect in Sudan in 1991.

"Women who enter Sudan through any ports and entry points should be dressed in a manner reflecting Islamic values. This condition for entering should be implemented in coordination with the aviation and external affairs ministries," it said.

"We are committed to ensuring that Islamic values are reflected on the life of society in Sudan and this does not contradict what others call human rights."

The more than 300 tribes in Africa's largest country include Muslims, Christians and animists.

The Islamist government is fighting a war with rebels who say they want more autonomy for the mostly Christian and animist south over the Muslim and Arab north.

Residents say most Northern Sudanese women are Muslim and have complied with the rules but southern women are hostile to the new dress code and many are expected to resist it.

In general, Islamic attire for women is a long flowing robe or dress covering the arms and legs and a head scarf.

SUNA quoted the head of the committee, Majzoub Khalifa, as saying that Christianity was stricter in ensuring modest dress.

The committee called for dresses and gowns to be provided to non-Muslim women at entry points and said special police are to be deployed at bus stops and stations to ensure the new rules are observed. It was not clear when they would take effect.

The rules said women in the private and public sectors should wear Islamic dress at work and it directed banks, companies and ministries not to serve women customers unless they were dressed in Islamic attire.

Khartoum state, one of 26 in Sudan, has donated 500 million Sudanese Pounds (\$210,000) to subsidize Islamic dress for its women university students.

In addition, the committee ruled that the first 15 seats in public buses be reserved for women and "all indecent expressions in means of public transport be removed and replaced with Koranic verses and the sayings of the Prophet."

"All inappropriate songs and unfit pictures should be removed from offices and public buildings," the committee said.

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Violence against women seen rife in Syria

10:13 p.m. May 30, 1999 Eastern

By Sultan Sleiman

DAMASCUS, May 31 (Reuters) - Fourteen-year-old Aisha picked dirt from beneath her fingernails and calmly recounted how her father used to rape her six years ago whenever they were alone at home.

"I used to think this was the way fathers expressed their love to their daughters until my uncle did the same to me," said the Syrian teenager, who asked that her real name not be used.

"I told my mother who challenged my father. But he just shouted at her and said that he owned me and had the right to do whatever he wanted to me."

Physicians, lawyers and activists say domestic violence, sexual or physical, and discrimination against women is common among conservative Syria's 16.7 million people, particularly in rural areas.

Ignorance, machismo and tribal customs which favour men fuel the violence and combine to make the lot of many Syrian women a miserable one.

Violence against women on the rise

Although there are no official estimates of domestic violence or rape, activists say the victims number in the thousands.

Mustapha Habash, head of the emergency department at Al-Muwasat hospital in Damascus, says he sees three to four victims of violence each month. Few take that step, since it draws in the police.

Aisha grew up watching her father beat her mother. "I know that she kept silent because she was afraid of getting divorced or thrown out onto the streets. Once he even divorced her and remarried her," she whispered, her head bowed.

After trying to commit suicide and at first failing to escape, she succeeded in reaching a police station where she was taken to an institution for juvenile delinquents. She has lived there for a month, under police protection. Her mother occasionally passes by for a brief visit.

Discrimination against women is also a serious problem in Syria, activists say. Many girls are denied education and proper health care by parents who favour their brothers.

"Our society is very violent. It is male-dominated, aggressive and suppressive," said cardiologist Ahmad at-Taqi, a former deputy.

"The number of girls who suffer heart problems is equal to the number of boys but 92 percent of surgery is performed on boys simply because traditions say that a girl child can be replaced," he added.

The pro-government General Union of Women (GUW) in Syria recently published a 1995 survey that showed 35.27 percent of Syria's population were illiterate and most of those — 25.87 percent — were female.

Some women feel the only way they can keep their husbands in a society that believes it is better to be with any man than alone is to place themselves under the surgeon's knife.

Mayyada Hinaidy, a female plastic surgeon, said more than half the women she operates on come to her under psychological pressure from their husbands.

"Imagine a woman after 20 years of marriage, during which she bore 10 kids, coming to you and asking you to restore her youth because her husband has started to complain about her shape," she said.

"It's tragic because this woman's future relies on my ability to fix what was destroyed by nature," Hinaidy added.

Laws do not favour women

Hanan Nijmeh, a lawyer and women's rights activist, said Syrian laws do not offer much protection. Lax legislation on domestic affairs, such as divorce and rape, ease the path of violence against women.

"Syrian society, like other Arab societies, is a patriarchy in which there is a struggle between what is traditional and what is new. So violence against women in places where illiteracy is high is more than in areas where education is widespread," she said.

Nijmeh said a woman in Syria always feels threatened by divorce, as a husband can just dispense with her without giving compensation. She cannot grant her children Syrian nationality if she marries a foreigner even if they were born there.

But perhaps the most controversial law against women, and one common in Arab countries, says a rapist can be acquitted if he marries his victim, Nijmeh said.

"This way, the woman suffers three times. First when she was raped, secondly when she is married to her rapist and thirdly when he inevitably divorces her after a few months," she added.

While activists and GYW officials slam some Syrian legislation as unfair to women, they say things have improved during the 30-year term of President Hafez al-Assad.

"Though we are satisfied with the woman's situation we have passed many proposals to parliament to change unfair laws,"

GYW member Raghida al-Ahmad told Reuters.

"We have 26 women in the 250-member parliament and two ministers in the 36-member cabinet. There are 132 women judges and 16 percent of lawyers and 44 percent of teachers are women," Ahmad said.

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Turkey:

New York Times
January 26, 2000
International

Turkish Terror Victim Espoused a Tolerant Islam

By Stephen Kinzer

ISTANBUL, Jan. 25 — With Turkey in shock over the discovery of dozens of savagely tortured bodies beneath the hide-outs of a religious terror group, much of the outrage and grief has been focused on the case of the only female victim.

The woman, Konca Kuris, was often described as a Muslim feminist. In books, articles, lectures and television appearances, she had described Islam as a religion that guarantees women's rights, and asserted that male commentators over the centuries had twisted its essence in ways that led to the oppression of women.

In July 1998, Ms. Kuris was kidnapped from the street in front of her home in the Mediterranean city of Mersin. There were no clues to her fate until her burned and disfigured body was exhumed on Saturday from a shallow grave in Konya, 220 miles northwest of Mersin.

Her body was one of 33 that have been found so far at properties used by Hizbullah, or the Party of God, a group dedicated to overthrowing the secular Turkish state and establishing an Islamic republic in its place. Police investigators are searching for more bodies.

Hizbullah is not believed to be connected to the similarly named group that has fought against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Both groups, however, proclaim loyalty to a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

According to press reports, the police team that uncovered Ms. Kuris's body also found a videotape containing scenes of torture sessions she endured over a

period of weeks. During one of the sessions, her captors are said to have accused her of seeking to become Turkey's version of Salman Rushdie or Taslima Nasrin, writers whom some Muslims consider heretics deserving of death.

"She had a great influence on Turkish women," said Ayse Onal, who has written several books on feminism in Turkey. "She showed that it's possible to be completely modern and still be faithful to Islam. That's why she was killed. Hizbullah, which is a very sick and deeply violent group, could not tolerate her point of view."

Ms. Kuris was the only intellectual among the Hizbullah victims found so far. Most of the others are believed to have been Kurdish businessmen from war-torn provinces in the southeast.

After the first bodies were found last week, several politicians, news commentators and others charged that the Turkish military had collaborated with Hizbullah in the early 1990's, encouraging its death squads to kill Kurds considered favorable to the cause of Kurdish nationalism.

President Suleyman Demirel rejected that charge, but appeared to agree that some government agents or agencies might have had connections to Hizbullah.

"The state does not commit murders or order murders to be carried out," Mr. Demirel told reporters in Ankara on Sunday.

"There may be forces belonging to the state that act illegitimately, but they are committing a crime."

Military commanders issued a statement denying that they or their predecessors had sponsored or aided Hizbullah.

"The general staff is closely following operations against the Hizbullah terror organization and shares the public's justified outrage at the horrors that have recently been uncovered," the

commanders said. "Directly linking this merciless murder network to the Turkish armed forces is a senseless and illogical slander."

Turkey is arguably the world's most secular Muslim country, and many people here, especially women, considered Ms. Kuris an exemplar of their tolerant brand of Islam.

Born in 1960, she was married at 17 and had five children.

At a young age she became interested in Islam, but quit the first religious sect she joined after being asked to wash its leaders' clothes. Later she made a trip to Iran with a Hizbullah delegation, but returned disillusioned with the organization because, she said, it supported a brand of Islam that was hostile to women.

After reading the Koran and various works of commentary, she began challenging religious orthodoxy, asserting that Islam does not require women to cover their hair with scarves and does not require the separation of the sexes at funerals or in schools.

She also urged that public prayers be offered in Turkish rather than the traditional Arabic.

"Konca used her mind, her emotions and her conscience to interpret God's message," said Gonul Tufekci, a lawyer who is prominent in Islamic feminist circles here.

"This approach challenges the ideology that tries to use Islam as a tool to keep women down. It is based on the concept of an open mind. This concept is repugnant not only to groups like Hizbullah, but to many institutions in this part of the world."

Related Article

* Mass Graves in Turkey Put Attention on Terror Cell (Jan. 23, 2000) <http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/europe/012300turkey-graves.html>

U.S.A./ Bangladesh:

Rediff on the Net
June 11, 1999

Bangladeshis Denounce Activist As 'Hindu Agent'

By Alysha Sideman in New York

Mina Saha Farah, a Bangladeshi dentist and businesswoman, has been causing constant irritants to conservative Bangladeshi Muslims. About a month ago, when a Bangladeshi imam was arrested for allegedly sexually molesting two young boys, Farah posed a question: If the imam is found guilty, would be stoned in public as per the Islamic law (shurya)? And now with the imminent publication of her book, *God On Trial* she is causing a bigger uproar among fellow Bangladeshis. There are about 20,000 people from Bangladesh living in and around New York City.

To the supporters of the imam — including two Bengali weeklies with over 8,000 readers — Farah is a trouble-maker, who writes extensively in New York Bengali papers about the plight of women and related issues, just to embarrass Islam.

"She is a Hindu, she was born a Hindu and she could be an agent of India," said one Bangladeshi businessman, speaking anonymously. "She has no business to talk about the imam — or about Islam for that matter."

"Could she have said all this in her own country?" he said, quickly adding, "I mean Bangladesh."

"There are too many enemies of Islam in America — and she will be of help to them."

Farah says she is a believer in one God, and does not follow any religion but being a Bangladeshi, she says she has a right to discuss about issues that affect people from her country.

The conservative Bangladeshis are upset by the publicity she received recently with an article in *The New York Times* about her book, criticizing Islam and other religions for not respecting women. Though copies of her book — with English and Bengali text — have been circulating for several weeks, many of her critics have not read the book. But some have been quick to dub her as Salman Rushdie's "sister."

"Has she also written a novel like that... (expletive deleted)?" asked a Bangladeshi cabbie, adding that if the book contained "serious" and "false" attacks on Islam, not just the Bangladeshi Muslims but the "entire" Muslim community will protest.

Farah has widely spoken on issues that anger the conservatives. She is a firm supporter of Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, an outspoken critic of Islam, who was forced to flee her country.

'Mina Farah should spend her money and her talents to help her community, not to divide it,' Showkat Ali, the president of the Bangladesh Journalists Association of North America, told *The Times*. 'We all have a responsibility to our culture.' Farah agrees fully with Ali's sentiments and says she is doing precisely that — exposing the negative aspects of the culture.

Farah says she is not daunted by threats — mostly telephone calls including obscene messages. Threats have also been made against her husband and children. Some callers have said they know she has family members in Bangladesh.

"People should have the freedom to speak and to think," she says. 'Is it not unfortunate that as we are entering the 21st century, we are becoming more of a mosque-based society rather than a free-minded society.'"

Uzbekistan:

The Guardian Weekly

**Letter from Uzbekistan
Tashkent terror***By Jennifer Balfour*

Wednesday March 3, 1999

I suppose a couple of days of international news coverage was as much as we could have expected.

Uzbekistan is small fry compared with Yugoslavia and Turkey, and while the world's attention moved on to Kosovo and the Kurds, we were left to ruminate about the day they tried to kill the president.

Uzbeks are not great news watchers. Faced with evenings of official speeches, massaged facts and party lines, one can understand why. But this was no ordinary cotton-picking scandal, this was news that everyone wanted to hear. And once the world's media focus had shifted, the state propaganda machine cranked up ready to sell the story it really wanted the people to hear.

Once the bombs had razed six major government buildings in the capital, Tashkent, missing President Islam Karimov by minutes, the selective information service could not continue in denial for long. Early attempts to pass off the event as a gas explosion or military manoeuvres collapsed when confronted with the terrible truth: the most peaceful state of the former Soviet Union was at war - but no one yet knew with whom. The superficial calm everyone had treasured for eight years was blown apart in one shattering hour.

I'll never have the stomach for war. The nearest I've ever been to a bullet was in Bucharest on Boxing Day 1989 after the tanks had done their stuff, and that was pretty frightening. So when, without warning, the ground shuddered and windows crashed, black mushroom clouds filled the sky and bombs exploded

around me, I realised while drinking coffee in a nearby caf* that something awful was happening. But the eeriest thing about a dictatorship is the silence. Until the official story could be released, despite obvious signs of a crisis, the message from smiling police on the streets of Tashkent was not to worry and to continue with life as usual.

President Karimov's appeal from the outset was for calm. With the official death toll by the first night standing at only one - even now it is only 17 - it was obvious that the state machinery had been grinding firmly forward. One would have needed a hard heart to resist the impassioned three-hour appearance of a beleaguered president on TV during the first evening. Orphaned at an early age, and now living in humble circumstances - not in splendour as we supposed - he convinced us it was not his choice to be president, but his duty, and we had to stand with him. Selected images of the bomb sites shocked but did not overwhelm, interviews with hand-picked casualties inspired pity without causing distress. Widely publicised compensation of \$300 for each affected family and generous offers to rebuild devastated houses received wide acclaim, and the president's popularity had soared by the end of the day.

Every school, university, office, medical clinic and factory has held compulsory meetings to disseminate the message that "evil" foreign elements were responsible for the outrage, and mosques have been closed to drive extremists to

ground.

"True" Islam has been defended on the radio by mullahs condemning the act as anti-Islamic.

Teachers have offered formulas on TV to cultivate law-abiding children, and politicians have backed the president all the way, claiming the future of democracy depends on his survival alone. Police chiefs have publicly sprung to his defence swearing to apprehend the

“thugs” within a month, and the president has vowed to chop off their hands personally.

There are of course many theories about who is responsible, but these are never aired in public. To venture a non-party line at this sensitive time would be a heinous crime on a par with the event itself. And while the platitudes and witch-hunts continue in public, the real debates rage in private. They will never be heard.

Instead we hear angry outbursts from President Karimov, usually coupled with threats, and occasionally the imposition of draconian measures, such as the anti-religious laws introduced last summer. President Karimov knows well that people united in hatred of a common enemy seldom divine the identity of the real instigator of ill.

The Guardian Weekly,
75 Farringdon Road,
London EC1M 3HQ, UK

Organisations

Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan (WAPHA)

WAPHA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit and independent organization founded by Zieba Shorish-Shamley, Ph.D. Its main goal is to promote awareness of the tragic human rights situation in Afghanistan and to advocate for social, political, economic and civil rights of the Afghan women and girls in that country. Gross violation of basic human rights continues to occur in Afghanistan.

WAPHA purposes are:

- To bring world's attention to the plight of the Afghan people and the predicament of the forgotten Afghan women and children.
- To promote peace and peace process activities both outside and inside Afghanistan.
- To advocate human rights on behalf of the Afghan people with an emphasis on women and children's rights.

WAPHA is dedicated to fight for the Afghan women's rights. We raise public consciousness and keep the issues alive by speaking to magazines, newspapers, radio, television and others public sources. We participate and present papers in academic seminars and conferences. We organize demonstrations and write appeal letters to the United Nations, United States Congress, Department of States, the White House, international human rights organization and foreign governments who are involved in Afghanistan.

We have done research on the general condition of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan in January 1998. We have testified three times on behalf of the Afghan People to the United States congress. We have participated and presented papers at the Commission on the Status of Women meetings at the United Nations, New York City, NY, March 1998. We also participated, presented papers and worked with Women's Caucus for Gender Justice, at the International Criminal Court conferences both in New York City, in March 1998 and in Rome, June and July 1998.

On December 9-10, 1998 WAPHA joined the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations, New York City, NY. On December 10, 1998, the representative of WAPHA met with His Excellency Kofi Annan, Secretary General to the United Nations; Ms. Angela King, Assistant Secretary General and Special Adviser to Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the United Nations; and Mrs. Mary Robinson, the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In these meetings, Shorish-Shamley raised the Afghan issues such as war, human rights violations, genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, aggression and others. She asked the United Nations for more action rather than rhetoric regarding the Afghan misery.

Our Internet contacts include hundreds of organizations in the world. We send news and keep the people of the world informed on the human rights violations in Afghanistan.

Zieba sHorish-Shamley, Ph. D.

Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan

Website: <http://www.wapha.org>

Uzbekistan:
Khujand Women's Center

Letter From: Gulbahor Mahkamova

Date: Mon, 18 Oct 1999 10:28:11 +0500 (TST)

Subject: Recent study on violence against women in Tajikistan

I represent the Women's Center "Gulruhsor" in Khujand, Tajikistan. We run a telephone hotline; provide psychological, medical and legal consultations; assist women at court hearings; participate in legislative work; distribute printed matters on the problem of violence; conduct sociological surveys and training seminars; and train volunteer hotline operators and social service workers. In addition, the center is involved in assistance in protecting women's reproductive rights and the strengthening of marriage and family institutions.

There is another opportunity for the leaders of women's movement to discuss such complex problem as preventing violence against women, another possibility to share ideas and strategies for eliminating violence in the society. In many countries of the world, including my home country, violence against women remains an important and serious problem. Social and economical difficulties, as a rule, produce only violence in the society. This, in turn, tells upon the relations between people, changes their psychology, especially among youth, which causes an increase in the rate of negative social phenomena, such as sexual demoralization, beatings, bodily injuries, insults and cruel treatment of women, children and the elderly.

In April 1998 a sociological survey was conducted among young women of the Leninabad Region, Republic of Tajikistan, on the topic of violence. As a result of their unprotected position, young women are subjected to violence in a larger degree. The main forms of violence towards girls and women in our society are their low social position (from a young age they have to carry all the burden of housework), beatings and insults from their fathers and brothers, deprivation of their right to freely communicate with representatives of the other sex, forced marriage, absence of choice "whether to give birth or not", economic dependence and absence of right to use family budget, limitation on social contacts, limits on communicating with relatives and friends, no right to choose work, prohibition to leave the house, to choose clothes, and other kinds of moral, physical and verbal violence.

80% of women surveyed said they have been subjected to verbal violence;

14% of young women were threatened with violence and physically abused by strangers in the street and in public transportation; 2% were sexually harassed at work; 21% admitted to being subjected to physical violence in their families.

The analysis of answers and observations revealed that women most often are subjected to violence in their families rather than elsewhere. To the question "Have you sought help from medical institutions?" 16% admitted they had to seek medical help after cases of cruel treatment, 10% remarked they did not consider it necessary, 74% of women would not address medical institutions in any circumstances. Female victims of violence do not find compassion and understanding from medical workers and fear publicity of such facts. Besides, they see no way out of the situation and do not know where to look for protection. There are no services where women in need would be provided qualified moral and psychological support, medical and legal advice and help. Analysis of questionnaires and personal conversations disclose the fact that young women who have been morally humiliated or physically abused cannot reveal their capabilities, they lose faith in themselves and self-esteem. Some are unable to control their behavior and drop out of

schools or leave their work in order to avoid conflicts in the family. In some cases parents are afraid that their daughter can face violence in the street or at the place of their study, that is why they force her to get married as soon as possible. When asked whether they felt protected in the society, more than 60% of women answered negatively.

With the present situation in the republic, a growing number of young women feel disappointment, depression, fear of future, and disbelief in people. There are many reasons for this: family problems, absence of place to live, economical dependence from their parents, husband, etc. Many feel helpless, unable to change their life, depressed and uncertain. In recent years, a sharp increase of the number of suicides is taking place, especially among women. Only in 1996 and in the first nine months of 1997 fifty-four suicidal attempts among women have been registered in Khujand. The Crisis Center in Khujand conducted an analysis of the facts of committed and attempted suicide. Each of the facts is thoroughly investigated by the

City Procurator's Office in order to disclose and prosecute the persons who lead the victim to suicide. However, not a single lawsuit was filed in the above-mentioned period.

The main reasons that make women commit suicide are: family problems, difficult interpersonal relations, loneliness, and nervous stress.

Suicidal thoughts are most often among young women of 20 to 25 years of age, who have just married or have been married for 3-4 years, who experience psychological or physical violence from their husbands or mothers-in-law.

A valuable analytical resource is the work of a telephone hotline operated by the Crisis Center of Khujand. This service entered the life of the women

of Khujand since April 1997. During eight months, from April 1997 to January 1998, 341 consultations were conducted. Analysis of calls indicates main causes of stressful situations for women using the hotline services:

- * domestic violence against women and children - 30 cases;
- * conflicts between the spouses - 46 cases;
- * rape - 4 cases;
- * unemployment - 31 cases;
- * legal problems - 25 cases;
- * conflicts between parents and children - 5 cases;
- * health problems - 37 cases;
- * forced marriage - 14 cases;
- * feeling of loneliness, desire to get acquainted with others - 6 cases.

The present survey revealed a number of problems, ranging from social and economical difficulties to imperfection of legislation. The numbers presented above require urgent action, not further research.

At the state level, it is necessary to:

- * design measures for social protection of women;
- * to prevent violence against women in all areas of life in accordance

with the UN Convention "On the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", adopted on December 10, 1993;

* to work out legal, civil, labor and administrative sanctions of punishment for violation of laws and compensation of damage to women - victims of violence, including domestic violence;

* to develop a wide network of services providing help to the victims of violence;

* to improve statistical reporting in order to receive complete and objective information about all forms of violence against women.

Numerous countries have been fighting for several decades to eradicate any kind of discrimination against women. They have achieved significant results, which gives us a good reason for hoping. This is the first time the problem of violence in Tajikistan has been publicly discussed. Until recent times, this topic was a sealed book, on which no research or statistical data were available. Only in 1996 the first Crisis Center for victims of violence and a telephone hotline were organized in Tajikistan. Due to efforts of many non-governmental women's organizations, the problem of violence ceased to be a personal matter and became a government's concern. Today, an open discussion of the problem of violence is possible in our society. We consider this an important step ahead, since it is only possible to find a solution to a problem when it can be discussed publicly.

Khujand Women's Center

"Gulruhsor" 12 Lenin St., Apt. 15,

Khujand

Republic of Tajikistan 735700

Contact person: Gulbahor Mahkamova, Director

Somalia:

We Are Women Activists (WAWA)

Daladda U Heelanayasha Danaha Haweenka

What is WAWA?

WAWA is a group of women's organizations who met in Bosasso, Somalia in March 2000 to form a network of activist women's groups working for peace and human rights. They chose the name WAWA to reflect their energy and enthusiasm (We Are Women's Activists) to work together. From its beginning WAWA was founded with the active participation of young women.

Opportunities for Women and Girls in Somalia

Even in the best of times, Somali women and girls did not get their fair share of resources—whether from family, clan, or government, in any of the areas of human needs and rights, including education and health. Ten years of civil war has meant a generation of youth have lost what opportunities previously existed for education and employment. For young women and girls the results have been even more devastating

Some activist Somali women have struggled, mainly in the fields of education and health, to try to provide opportunities for all, including girls and women. However, the Somali women activists see that their efforts, though large in respect to the meager financial resources they are working with, do not even come close to providing the needed opportunities for women and girls.

Although capable and well respected in their communities, many activist Somali women sometimes feel powerless to help make necessary changes, because women are not decision

makers at any level of civil society or government. Decisions that effect their lives are made by local authorities and internationals without women even being consulted.

Formation of the WAWA Network

Out of this experience, a group of women activist leaders in northeast Somalia (Puntland) came together in Bosasso in late March 2000 to set up a network to advocate for women's participation as decision makers at all levels of civil society and government. They call their network "WAWA", an acronym for We Are Women Activists, or in Somali, Daladda U Heelanayasha Danaha Haweenka.

The founding organizations included groups that were formerly part of the Bari Women's Confederation. They decided to dissolve BWC to form a larger network. Other organizations involved in the formation of WAWA, included Horn Relief, Somali Women Concern and Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development.

WAWA hopes to join with other organizations throughout the world who are working for peace, human rights and women's political participation. The WAWA Network is open to membership by women's groups and associate membership of any interested groups or individuals. Although it started in the northeast of Somalia, WAWA hopes to reach beyond this region. WAWA is the result of a long struggle of Somali women activists who made their independent decision to form the network and then seek support. WAWA from the beginning has recognized that it cannot succeed without the integration of young women in all its work, its structure and decision making.

WAWA's vision is to institutionalize a network of activist Somali women's organizations to work for peace and human rights through women's participation in decision making at all levels of civil society, the economy and the state.

WAWA's mission includes

- 1) Training of Activists (TOA) among WAWA member women organizations, especially young women, in leadership, advocacy, civic education and decision making.
- 2) Increasing WAWA member organizations' access to information and communication on advocacy for peace and human rights especially through technology (email and Internet).
- 3) Mobilizing resources for training, communication and advocacy for the development of the WAWA network
- 4) Advocating for women's participation in decision making in civil society, the economy and the state (including policymaking and implementation)
- 5) Monitoring and evaluating activities regarding women's participation in decision making in government and civil society, including international organizations
- 6) Strengthening linkages of the WAWA Network with other women's organizations and networks, including international women's groups.

We need your help and support!

Become an Associate Member of the WAWA Network!!

For more information

*contact Hawa Isse Mohamud, in Bosasso, fax: 252-5-825025, or 252-523-4801
or c/o Horn Relief, Nairobi Office, tel/fax: 254-2-724193, email horn-rel@nbnet.co.ke*

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Al-Fatiha

Mission Statement:

The Al-Fatiha Foundation is an international organization dedicated to Muslims who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered, those questioning (LGBTQ) their sexual orientation or gender identity, and their friends.

Al-Fatiha's goal is to provide a safe space and a forum for LGBTQ Muslims to address issues of common concern, share individual experiences, and institutional resources. The Al-Fatiha Foundation aims to support LGBTQ Muslims in reconciling their sexual orientation or gender identity with Islam. Al-Fatiha promotes the Islamic notions of social justice, peace and tolerance, to bring all closer to a world that is free from prejudice, injustice and discrimination.

Goals and Objectives

1. Support Muslims who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, and those who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.
2. Foster spirituality among LGBTQ Muslims.
3. Provide a supportive and understanding environment for LGBTQ Muslims who seek to reconcile their sexuality or gender identity with Islam.
4. Empower LGBTQ Muslims by creating safe spaces to share individual experiences and by providing information about institutional resources.
5. Advocate on behalf of LGBTQ Muslims in national and international forums
6. Encourage and initiate dialogue with Muslim communities around issues of sexuality and gender.

The Al-Fatiha Foundation aims to accomplish its mission, goals, and objectives by: -
Establishing local support & discussion groups for LGBTQ Muslims in the U.S. and abroad. -
Holding regional, North American, and international meetings.

- Outreach on the internet

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Global Reproductive Health Forum: South Asia News

What is Bol!?

Bol is a space for people and organizations within South Asia and outside to come together, discuss and work on issues of gender, reproductive health and rights and legal developments pertaining to human rights within the region.

Bol is a bulletin board where you can post information about activities - conferences, workshops, rallies; and about resources - networks, people and organizations. You can also use this list to publicize events that would be difficult to publicize otherwise.

Bol is a forum to discuss problems and solutions to the task of gender equality - you can use this network to meet other people working in diverse disciplines online, linking you up with support and information that would be difficult to access by traditional means. Every month, we will have a topic of discussion which will generate from the interests of the list. We also publish <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/Organizations/healthnet/SAAsia/frontpage.html> Re/productions, online journal for people to present ongoing works examining the issues in more depth. The journal will also be a space to present and share research and abstracts with a larger audience.

Recognizing that most public spaces within South Asia, off and online, is dominated by the discourse of men, we ask you to be aware that Bol! is set up as a forum where women and men can get together and discuss issues - we therefore ask you to join only if you think you are going to be a supportive and co-operative member of the list.

This list is moderated - mails will be posted according to their relevance.

(Bol! is part of the <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/Organizations/healthnet/index.html> Global Reproductive Health Forum of the Harvard School of Public Health. The Global Forum is set up to provide up-to-date information from a variety of disciplines on reproductive health issues around the world, to help users access this information from diverse sources and to develop forums for active and democratic discussion. It is also dedicated to helping to reverse the flow of information generated by the North concerning the South, by helping to widely disseminate and distribute the work of Southern researchers and activists concerning reproductive health and rights.)

If you would like more information, please contact us at: Sushma Joshi and Tal Halpern Co-ordinators, Global Reproductive Health Forum in South Asia, Kathmandu, Nepal

Phone: 977-1- 520858 E-mail: <mailto:harvard@mos.com.np>

What is a mailing list?

Mailing lists, more commonly known as listservs, are the electronic version of conferences and journals. A listserv is much like a subscription to a magazine, only the "contributors" are the subscribers themselves, and the "issues" that are delivered to you are the email messages of others. Listservs function through email: you use your email program to subscribe to a listserv, read postings, and reply to the list. Unlike regular email, however, you receive and read messages posted to all subscribers, and when you post, you post to everyone on the list.

Many professional and special interest groups use listservs to ask questions, carry on debates, or post information of general interest to their community. Some listservs are closed: you must get permission from the list manager to subscribe. Postings are screened for suitability before being posted on moderated listservs; unmoderated listservs allow anyone to post anything.

Because listservs are public forums, you should take care that your postings are relevant to the topic, well-considered, and not offensive. Don't post anything you aren't willing to defend publicly. Usually it is a good idea to monitor a listserv for some time before writing your first post, in order to become familiar with the topics under discussion, what is appropriate and what isn't, and answers to frequently-asked questions.

Listservs are managed by listserv software: special software that adds and drops subscribers automatically, sends postings to subscribers, and performs mundane administrative tasks. Each list has its corresponding listserv software: you send requests for subscriptions, unsubscriptions, help, and so on to the listserv software, not the list. It is important to know the difference, because it is considered bad form to send administrative requests to the list itself.

To subscribe to the listserv, send a message to the listserv software address: <MAILTO:majordomo@mos.com.np>majordomo@mos.com.np with the message: subscribe bol Leave the subject line blank. Put in the body of the message the simple one-line command: subscribe bol . Send the message.

Remember, you are sending your request to a machine, not a person, and any extraneous material (such as a signature, for example) may result in your subscription request being ignored.

After subscribing, you'll receive an introductory email from the list, explaining how to unsubscribe, how to get help for various features of the list, and what the scope/purpose of the list is. Save this message for future reference.

Depending on the amount of traffic on the list, you should soon start receiving email from other list members. Some lists are very active: 40-50 messages a day is not uncommon. Other lists only have occasional postings. In any event, be sure to check your email regularly, and consider carefully the lists you want to read; too many subscriptions can result in hours in front of the computer, reading and deleting email, or, if you leave your account unattended too long, an overfilled mailbox and a frozen email account. Each list will have its own instructions for subscribing; usually, instructions on how to subscribe will be included with the announcement about the list. The above instructions will work most of the time, but not necessarily all of the time.

How to subscribe / post to Bol!

Please save this file for future reference. It contains useful information on how to use the list.

1. To subscribe, send a message to: <MAILTO:majordomo@mos.com.np>majordomo@mos.com.np with the following command in the body of your email message: subscribe bol

Leave the subject blank.

2. If you ever want to remove yourself from this mailing list, send mail to: <MAILTO:majordomo@mos.com.np> majordomo@mos.com.np with the following command in the body of your email message: unsubscribe bol

3. To post a message which will be sent to the entire list, address it to: <MAILTO:bol@mos.com.np>bol@mos.com.np

To send a message to the list, simply address an email and compose the message as you would for a person, only use the list name as the address. For example: to send a message to the entire body of Bol! subscribers, you would address the message to bol@mos.com.np . Be careful when using "Reply" to reply to a message: some lists are automatically set to reply

to the entire list, while others send you reply to the person who wrote the original message. Make sure your reply is going where you want it to go.

(not yet available)

Search the Bol! Archives

Keywords:

Words in Thread:

Option: search other sections of GRHF:

Bol! Archives
Cyber-fem Archives
All Sections of site
RT21 - Reproductive Technologies
South Asia Project
West Africa Project
Gender Reproductive Health and Rights
HIV/AIDS Services
Contraception
Abortion
Population/Family Planning
Maternal Health

The Global Reproductive Health Forum in South Asia

(This list is made possible with the technical support of Mercantile, Kathmandu, Nepal)

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights

Purpose

The Urgent Action Fund, a global network of women and men committed to a world of equality and social justice, provides immediate financial support for unanticipated and time-urgent opportunities to advance the human rights of women within the context of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Focus

The focus of the Urgent Action Fund is the human rights and full participation of women in:

- Areas where armed conflict has recently occurred or where there is a significant threat of armed conflict.
- Closed environments where women's freedom of movement and access to information are severely restricted by government policy or customary laws.
- Unusual breakthrough opportunities that may emerge in areas outside our focus.

Response

The Urgent Action Fund responds to most requests within 72 hours.

Only requests endorsed by members of our broad global network of trusted friends and colleagues are considered.

Grants are provided in support of individuals or groups but must be transferred through non-government or religious organizations.

The Urgent Action Fund does not provide grants for general humanitarian support or emergency relief. The Fund will consider requests for protection of individual women's human rights defenders in leadership positions who are threatened because of their activism.

The Fund makes grants ranging from \$ 100 to \$ 5,000 US.

Applying for a Grant

Requests may be made directly (by phone, fax, or email) or through individuals and organizations in our advisory network. Requests received without endorsement may require

additional response time. Formal proposals are not necessary, however, the request should include the following information:

1. Name of the group who will accept responsibility for the grant including the name of a contact person, address, telephone, fax and email numbers.
2. The amount requested and how the funds will be used.
3. A description of the urgent opportunity, of how the grant will be used to take advantage of the opportunity, and, most important, of how the grant will support a broader strategy to advance the rights of women in the region or globally.

Criteria

Requests meeting the following criteria will receive consideration by the Board.

- The request is strategic, that is, related to a pre-determined strategy or plan to advance women's human rights or equality.
- The request is unanticipated and time urgent demonstrating that if funds are not allocated quickly the opportunity will pass.
- The request shows that other funding is not likely.
- The request represents a defining issue, event or opportunity for affecting structural change that will advance women's human rights.
- The request has the support of others involved in the women's human rights or related fields locally, globally or both.
- The request demonstrates the grantee's capacity to build from the opportunity.

Grants can pay for but are not limited to: legal support, media campaigns and public education, transportation, language services, emergency personal support related to the strategy. Brief reports are required.

Confidentiality

Information about the circumstances of the request will be kept confidential at the request of the grantee.

All grants are made anonymously through the Tides Foundation.

Sample Grants 1997-98

Women in Solidarity in Haiti (SOFA):

In April 1998, armed uniformed Haitian police destroyed a women's health clinic in Port-au-Prince looking for weapons supposedly smuggled in with medical supplies. The attack came at a time when right-wing forces influential in the police department were trying to intimidate community organizers in anticipation of upcoming elections. Despite hundreds of calls and letters of protest clinic doors were padlocked and no action was taken against the police. The Urgent Action Fund made a grant to help SOFA mobilize women around the country to demand justice and re-open the clinic. More than a thousand women marched in a show of solidarity in Port-au-Prince and the clinic was re-opened.

Center for Women War Victims/Croatia

Following a televised presentation by five women's rights groups about the increase in domestic violence in Croatia since the war, a well-known journalist attacked the activists in a State-owned newspaper calling them "traitors, witches" and "Serb sympathizers." The groups used a grant from the Urgent Action Fund to file individual lawsuits against the paper

and the journalist, and to launch a campaign against sex discrimination in the media. This is the first lawsuit of its kind in the Balkan region.

International Needs/Ghana:

As compensation for the crimes of family members, young women and girls are given as slaves to fetish shrines in the ancient practice called Trokosi. Over the past eight years International Needs Ghana has worked to eliminate the practice by educating families, working for national legislation, convincing fetish priests to release the girls, and providing rehabilitation services. As pressure mounted for legislation to be signed into law, 18 priests agreed to release 115 women. Money from the Fund helped to pay for rituals conducted by the priests to reassure families and communities as the women were released.

NOTE: The Urgent Action Fund has made grants that cannot be publicly described to protect the safety of the individuals involved. Several of these involve violence or threats of violence because of sexual orientation.

Advisory network

The Urgent Action Fund relies on the advice and recommendations of trusted friends and colleagues throughout the world who assist with the distribution of information about the Fund, identify potential grantmaking situations, advise about grant requests, outreach efforts, and the needs and priorities of women in their areas of expertise.

The Urgent Action Fund is a project of the Tides Foundation, San Francisco, California, USA.

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fax: 415/460-6667
email: urgentact@aol.com*

Books and Papers

Return to Childhood: The Memoir of a Modern Moroccan Woman

Leila Abouzeid

Centre for Middle Eastern Studies of University of Texas

*Texas
U.S.A.*

The Story of the Daughters of Quchan: Gender of National Memory in Iranian History

Afsaneh Najmabadi

1998

Syracuse University Press

*Syracuse, NY
U.S.A.*

Bibliography of Arab Women's Literature

Masadir al-Adab al-Nisa'i fi al-'Alam al-'Arabi al-Hadith (Bibliography of Women's Literature in the Modern Arab World) by Dr. Joseph T. Zeidan has recently been published by al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyah lil-Dirasat wa-al-Nashr. This is an updated and much expanded version of the work with the same title published by al-Nadi al-Adabi al-Thaqafi in Saudi Arabia in 1986. This new edition has entries for 1271 Arab women literary authors from 1800 to 1996, listed alphabetically by last name. Each entry contains biographical information, a bibliography of the woman's writings, and a bibliography of critical works on her in Arabic and Western languages. The work concludes with a list of general sources on the topic in Arabic and Western languages. The book [783 p.] has been published in hardback and is of excellent production quality.

Copies may be ordered directly from the author by mail, fax, or e-mail for \$49.95. Shipping and handling charges in the U.S., \$3.50; to other countries, by airmail US \$18.30; by surface mail US \$ 9.55; by book rate US \$ 5.25.

Dr. Joseph T. Zeidan

*3054 Hamden Court
Dublin OH 43017
fax 614-292-1262
e-mail zeidan.1@osu.edu*

Joseph T. Zeidan is Associate Professor of Near Eastern Studies at The Ohio State University. His publications include Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond (SUNY, 1995), named as one of the Outstanding Academic Books of 1995 by Choice Magazine; The Unknown Works of Mayy Ziyada (UAE, 1996).

Gender and Human Rights Violations Manuals to be Published

OTTAWA ñ November 24, 1999 ñ Two innovative manuals on a standardized gender-sensitive methodology for documenting human rights violations will be published tomorrow by Amnesty International ñ Canada and the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.

A Methodology for Gender-Sensitive Research and a companion booklet Documenting Human Rights Violations by State Agents: Sexual Violence are being launched on November 25 to coincide with the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence ñ which continues until December 10, International Human Rights Day.

ïWe are very proud to be contributing to the global efforts to recognize women's rights as human rights and to join with Amnesty International to better document

human rights violations against women," said Warren Allmand, the President of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD).

It is important to have accurate and consistent documentation of women's rights violations, in monitoring the adherence of governments and the international community to agreements and treaties," noted Roger Clark, the Secretary General of the English Branch of the Canadian section of Amnesty International.

Agnès Callamard of Amnesty's International Secretariat in London wrote the manuals while the Women's Rights Programme of the ICHRDD coordinated by Ariane Brunet, oversaw the research project and sponsored its publication in French and English.

For the first time Amnesty International in Canada, the Secretariat of Amnesty International in London, and the Montreal-based International Centre have pooled their expertise and resources in this project designed to assist local activists, non-governmental organizations and other agencies to collect, analyze and disseminate information on violence against women.

The companion booklet Documenting Human Rights Violations by State Agents: Sexual Violence provides a step-by-step description of a gender-sensitive approach to research and suggests ways of addressing the specific challenges faced by women's rights workers. It focuses on the monitoring and documenting of specific categories of women's rights violations, helps the reader prepare for fact-finding missions and provides guidelines for the collection and analysis of evidence.

Three more booklets are planned. They will address the issue of documenting human rights violations in the family, in the community and in armed conflict.

For further information on the launch and to obtain copies of the books for review:

John Tackaberry - Media Relations in Amnesty International (613) 744-7667 #236 or

Patricia Poirier in Director of Communications in ICCHRD (514) 283-6073

The ICHRDD is an independent and non-partisan Canadian institution with an international mandate, working with citizens and governments in Canada and abroad to promote human rights and democratic development through dialogue, capacity building, advocacy and public education. It focuses its programmes and activities in four themes: women's human rights, indigenous peoples' rights, globalization and human rights and democratic development and justice.

Communiqué pressrelease

Centre international des droits de la personne et du développement démocratique

International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development

63, rue de Brésoles, Montréal, Québec, Canada
H2Y 1V7 TEL. : (514) 283-6073 Télécopieur/Fax
(514) 283-3792
HYPERLINK <mailto:ichrdd@ichrdd.ca>
<http://www.ichrdd.ca>

Women, work and islamism

Ideology and resistance in Iran

Maryam Poya, Visiting fellow at the Open University and visiting lecturer at Birkbeck and SOAS

Based on original research into women's participation in the workforce, this book is the most up-to-date study of women in Iran available. The Islamisation of state and society which followed the 1979 revolution involved an attempt by the Islamic state to seclude women within the home. However, the power of the state was constrained by many factors, - the Iran - Iraq war, economic restructuring and women's own responses to oppression. In spite of continual attempts by the state to strengthen patriarchal relationships, women's

participation in the labour force in 1999 is greater than it was before the revolution.

Women's participation in the economy and in political movements has led to a much greater level of gender consciousness in the 1990s than at the height of westernisation in the 1960s and 70s. Religious and secular women in urban areas have demanded reforms and forced the Islamic state to return to the position of the pre-1979 reforms.

Providing a history of Iran, an introduction to Islamism and an analysis of the women and Islam debate, this book will be necessary reading for students and academics of Middle East studies, women's studies and labour studies.

"Timely, readable and well informed... This book offers a rare account of changing policies on women's employment in the Islamic Republic, examines the complex interplay between state ideology and economic realities and vividly illustrates the contradictory outcomes for women themselves"

Deniz Kandiyoti

**School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London**

September 1999

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*Women's Studies/Middle East Studies/Islamic
Studies/Sociology of Work*

Hb 1 85649 681 3 £ 39,95 \$ 55,00

Pb 1 85649 682 1 £ 13,95 \$ 19,95

208 pages Notes Charts Tables Bibliography Index

**Her Honor: An Islamic Critique of
the Rape Laws of Pakistan from a
Woman-Sensitive Perspective**

by Asifa Qureshi.

*The website address at which the above paper may
be read is given below:*

http://www.karamah.org/karamah/publications/rape_main.htm

Periodicals

Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State, and Society

Edited by Barbara M. Hobson, Sonya Michel, and Ann Shola Orloff

Published by the University of Illinois Press Social Politics is an interdisciplinary, international, English-language journal edited by three distinguished scholars. It features articles on gender and social policy, citizenship, and the role of states in constructing and organizing relations in the family, workplace, and society. Up-to-date briefings on gender and social policies in specific countries are also included.

Frequency:

Three times a year: Spring, Summer, and Fall

Bibliographic Information:

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Subscribers:

Scholars, students, and professionals interested in gender studies, history,

sociology, political science, economics, philosophy, and law.

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SAMAR: South Asian Magazine for Action & Reflection

SAMAR magazine addresses South Asians in Northern America, but also seeks to engage readers of progressive disposition and wide sympathies who do not necessarily identify themselves as South Asian. We believe that issues concerning the South Asian community can neither be understood nor resolved by focusing exclusively on this community alone. We encourage informed criticism and deeper insights into ongoing events in South Asia and in the U.S. that concern South Asians.

At the same time, we highlight the changing character of the South Asian community itself. We draw energy from the scholarly as well as the activist communities, and seek to formulate analyses of ongoing social forces and to highlight alternatives, progressive and visionary, to prevailing ideas and institutions. We invite you to join us in nurturing a critical community that can engage with South Asians within and

without the subcontinent, and help promote arguments for social and economic justice.

Latest Issue is available for \$5.

Mail cheque to SAMAR, P.O. Box 1349, Ansonia Station, New York NY 10023, U.S.A. Individuals: 1 year= US \$9, 2-year=US \$18. Institutional: 1 year= US \$32.

Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion

The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion is a channel for the publication of feminist scholarship in religion and a forum for discussion and dialogue among women and men of differing feminist perspectives.

The Journal has two parents: the academy, in which it is situated, and the feminist movement, from which it draws its nourishment and vision.

Its editors are committed to rigorous thinking and analysis in the service of the transformation of religious studies as a discipline and the feminist transformation of religious and cultural institutions.

Co-editors

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Emilie M. Townes, Union Theological Seminary

Please visit our new website at <http://www.hds.harvard.edu/jfsr>

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Audiovisuals

E-mail regarding a film on FGM on Egypt

11 April 2000

We have produced a video against Female Genital Mutilation in Egypt. The video has been well received by many NGOs working in the villages of Upper Egypt.

The video gives a sensitive insight in why women want FGM to be done to their daughters, and also why an increasing (but still small!) number of women do want to abolish the habit.

According to trustworthy statistics, 96% of girls is [are] being circumcised in Egypt.

The video is 37 minutes. It is Arabic spoken, and available with English subtitles. You can have a version in Pal or NTSC.

In Cairo we deliver for LE 29,50. Outside Cairo - anywhere in the world - the postman delivers for USD 29.50

If you're interested, let me know and we'll make sure you get your copy asap. Please if you are in Cairo, send us your phone number so we can contact you before we deliver.

Kind regards, Jos M. Strengholt

<http://www.mediahouse.org>

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