

Trouble & Strife

Special Issue

The radical feminist magazine

No. 43
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**Piecing it together: feminist
perspectives after September 11**

Trouble & Strife is cockney rhyming slang for wife. We chose this name because it acknowledges the reality of conflict in relations between women and men. As radical feminists, our politics come directly from this tension between men's power and women's resistance.

This special issue of Trouble & Strife was produced by Sophie Laws and Helen Lowe.

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Editorial

At times this undertaking has felt slightly crazy. Western world in panic over terrorism? US/UK bombing one of the poorest countries on earth? Middle East crisis worse than ever? Dread the next news bulletin? And what do we do? Produce a feminist magazine!

After September 11, and especially after the attack on Afghanistan, many people felt challenged. A sense of powerlessness fought with the urge to act. A sudden appreciation of how little one knew about many things struggled with the need to make sense of current events. The two of us kept finding each other at demonstrations, meetings, teach-ins.

On a march against the bombing, we find the feminist presence is muted to say the least. Doves and banners call for peace, some of them in women's name. The Socialist Workers Party placards put it all down to imperialism. Leaflets abound explaining why this or that minute left sect has absolutely the right line on this situation. Small groups of feminists stand by (actually one of us was sitting under a tree breastfeeding) while large phalanxes of militant Muslim fundamentalist men hurry past. Some of the chanting is apparently in favour of the Taliban. Certainly nothing remotely expresses our perspective.

And at a meeting of the anti-war 'coalition', the SWP dominates with its annoyingly familiar style of silencing any line it doesn't approve of, and rushing to organise the revolution before any of us are even introduced. You could almost believe with their sense of urgency that they will stop the war, but really it's just to shut up any dissent.

We also attend an ad hoc feminist meeting, called by Women Against Fundamentalisms, Women In Black, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, and others, and it is here that Helen is

inspired to produce a publication to explore feminist responses to these events. Sophie was a founding member of the *Trouble & Strife* collective, and we wonder about making it a special issue of *T&S*. We approach the current collective and they are pleased. They give us editorial control and while this one is rather different from previous issues, we hope it maintains the *T&S* spirit and tradition.

We knew there were feminists 'out there' who for years had been studying Muslim fundamentalism internationally, and had opposed and challenged its development in many countries — we wanted to know how they saw this new situation.

We knew of the existence of Afghan feminists, entirely ignored by the news media while US aggression was presented as if it were on their behalf. We needed to seek them out.

This magazine is the result of such searching. We hope it will help you a little with yours.

One apology: that this issue was not out in April as we hoped it would be. We bit off rather more than we could chew. This means that some articles are somewhat out of date, through no fault of the authors. For example the pieces by Palestinian women were written before the terrible incursions by Israel. But while change is rapid at present, the underlying issues remain depressingly stable, and we think that everything in the issue will be of great interest for some time to come.

The fact that the magazine has appeared at all is due to tremendous, readily given, help from many women, often in response to direct requests from us! We are extremely grateful (thanks to them appear more fully on the inside front cover). □

Afghanistan special

Afghanistan special

Afghanistan special

The next four articles reflect, in different ways, Afghan feminists' voices raised in protest, particularly their responses to the events following September 11. Following the first piece drawing on RAWA's uniquely powerful statements, Purna Sen analyses the new problems that the Western-imposed settlement is bringing to Afghan women. The third article describes some Afghan women's organisations — inspiring when, to listen to the Western media, you would think Afghan women entirely victimised and passive. Finally, we reproduce a 'living draft for Afghan women's rights', written in November 2001, and a timeline to help understand what has happened on Afghan women's rights since September 11. Other short items illustrate the reality of women's lives in Afghanistan.

'We will never collaborate'

Many T&S readers will be familiar with the name of the best-known Afghan women's group, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Here Sue O'Sullivan and Isabel Ros López present a selection of statements by RAWA on the situation after September 11. This is followed by an interview with Tahmeena Faryal of RAWA, reprinted from a US feminist publication.

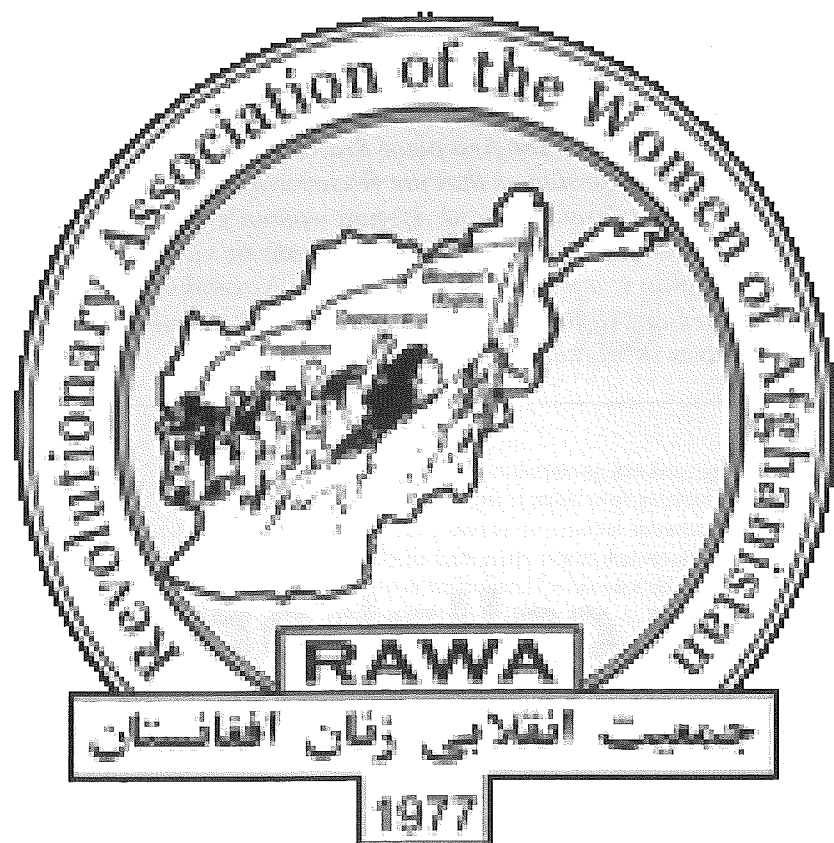
RAWA stands alone in its adherence to both secularism and democracy: 'Democracy is just like fresh air without which a humane living would be impossible.' Unyielding in its passionate defence of Afghan women in the face of religious fundamentalism of any sort, RAWA occupies an important yet uneasy position in relation to competing forces in Afghanistan and its neighbours, as well as to feminist and other interests in the west.

RAWA's secularism, its denunciation of the Taliban and of the equally detested Northern Alliance (NA), might be seen as a 'natural' focus for feminists and mainstream opinion in the west. RAWA waged a long and dangerous struggle against the imposed communist regime and subsequently against the Northern Alliance and then the Taliban. Now they are campaigning

against the reintroduction of the Northern Alliance. RAWA supports the return of the exiled king, Zahir Shah, as the best of a less than perfect lot. Through the years RAWA has staged demonstrations, organised strikes in schools and universities, run schools and a hospital for refugees, as well as continuously publishing news, information and analysis. Some early members of RAWA spent years in prison; their founder, Meena, and two other women were murdered.

RAWA is committed to the feminist principle of women's self-determination. 'We are of strong belief that emancipation of women from fundamentalism or any other oppression would be the sole responsibility of women themselves. Unless and until Afghan women are organised, conscious and determined to fight for their rights,

All illustrations with permission from RAWA/World Picture News



they would achieve no genuine emancipation'. Yet RAWA's insistence on the need for revolutionary change in order to secure anything approaching liberation for Afghan women, unsettles any simple appreciation. RAWA holds harsh opinions about other Afghan women's groups and individual women now holding positions within the transitional administration. In a recent interview a RAWA spokeswoman was asked whether RAWA would continue demonstrating after having been attacked by fundamentalists. She replied: 'Of course there is still the danger of such cowardly attacks on RAWA's events from the fundamentalist's side, but unlike all other Afghan women's groups we will never give up and collaborate with these criminals.'

RAWA is an extremely active organisation. It issues timely statements and has done so for many years previous to the attacks of September 11. Its website and email output gives it a high profile in electronically oriented countries. The following are some of the statements issued by RAWA via its website following the overthrow

of the Taliban. Their overriding theme is that the fall of the Taliban is not the great triumph for women's equality that mainstream western media have presented it as. Women will only gain rights and freedom when they can make their voices heard within a secular and democratic Afghanistan.

On the principles that should govern a future Afghan State

RAWA calls for a future Afghan State which will be based on the following principles:

- unqualified adherence to the principles and criteria of democracy and its major tenet, secularism
- strict prohibition of all forms of decrees, fatwas, etc in regard to women and what they should wear. (Isn't ten long years of suppression and waging of a savage and vile war on women enough?)
- total and absolute abrogation of political police organisations or other institutions of civil espionage, torture or harassment, be it of the type of the Parchami, Khalqi, Jihadi or Taliban regimes, or in any other form. (A museum of shame should be established to record the totality of the infamies perpetrated by these successive regimes.)
- prosecution of all individuals who, during the past 23 years have committed high treason, war crimes, blatant violations of human rights and plunder of national assets
- abolition and proscription of all religious madrassas and other terrorist dens where Jihadi and Taliban mindsets are promoted and trained
- investigation and extraction of hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of funds embezzled and misappropriated by Jihadi and Taliban thieves from public coffers or from international financial assistance funds.
- debarment of higher echelon individuals of Jihadi and Taliban parties from holding high public office. Likewise, debarment of intellectuals who, whether inside or outside Afghanistan, shamelessly put their talents, pens and voices at the service of Jihadi and Taliban criminals.

On the Northern Alliance

US intervention helped the Northern Alliance to come again to the scene. And it is well known that the NA is such an infamous fundamentalist camp that the Taliban's barbaric wrongdoings

against women pale in comparison to the inhuman crimes the NA committed against our tortured women.

The people of Afghanistan do not accept domination of the Northern Alliance! Though the NA has learned how to pose sometimes before the West as 'democratic' and even a supporter of women's rights, in fact they have not at all changed, as a leopard cannot change its spots. (*Appeal to the UN and the world community, 13 November 2001*)

On US involvement in Afghanistan

On September 11, 2001 the world was stunned with the horrific terrorist attacks on the United States. RAWA stands with the rest of the world in expressing our sorrow and condemnation for this barbaric act of violence and terror... But unfortunately we must say that it was the government of the United States who supported Pakistani dictator General Zia-ul Haq in creating thousands of religious schools from which the germs of Taliban emerged. In the similar way, as is clear to all, Osama Bin Laden has been the blue-eyed boy of CIA. But what is more painful is that American politicians have not drawn a lesson from their pro-fundamentalist policies in our country and are still supporting this or that fundamentalist band or leader. In our opinion any kind of support to the fundamentalist Taliban



International Women's Day 2002. As always, the Pakistani authorities refused to allow RAWA to hold the function in the biggest hall in the city.

and Jihadis is actually trampling democratic, women's rights and human rights values. (*From RAWA statement on the terrorist attacks in the US, 14 September 2001*)

The continuation of US attacks and the increase in the number of innocent civilian victims not only gives an excuse to the Taliban, but also will cause the empowering of the fundamentalist forces in the region and even in the world. Only an overall uprising can prevent the repetition and recurrence of the catastrophe that has befallen our country before, and with or even without the presence of the UN peace-keeping force this uprising can pave the way for the establishment of an interim government and preparation for elections. We believe that once there is no foreign interference, especially of a fundamentalist type, all ethnic groups of all religions, with no regard to the devilish designs of the fundamentalists, will prove their solidarity for achieving the most sacred national interests for the sake of a proud and free Afghanistan. (*From RAWA statement on the US strikes on Afghanistan, 11 October 2001*)

On International Women's Day 2002

Partisans of freedom, sisters and brothers, when celebrating March 8th last year, RAWA expressed the fond hope that in the coming year, 2002, we [would] be celebrating International

Women's Day inside a free and liberated Afghanistan. During the course of the past year the world community was shocked by events emanating from Afghanistan and contemporary history has been drastically changed by them.

The women of the world celebrate International Women's Day with spirit and enthusiasm; in Afghanistan women still don't feel safe enough to throw away their wretched burqa shrouds, let alone raise their voices in the thousands in support of freedom and democracy. There is still a wide chasm between us and the glorious future we have fixed our eyes, hearts and minds upon. (From RAWA statement on International Women's Day, 8 March, 2002, Peshawar, Pakistan)

Breaking the chain of violence

On 12 November 2001 Sonali Kolhatkar, the vice president of the Afghan Women's Mission, interviewed Tahmeena Faryal, a member of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan during Tahmeena's visit to the United States. Much has happened since the interview took place: the Taliban fell, the US abandoned its advertised concern for the welfare of Afghan women and RAWA was excluded from the conference in Bonn that created an interim government. The Northern Alliance and other fundamentalist groups were represented at the Bonn conference, while less than ten per cent of all participants were women. Violent warlords have seized power in the absence of an interna-

tional peacekeeping force and Afghan women find themselves still living in terror in the post-Taliban, war-devastated country, with no end in sight. In this interview, Tahmeena gives historical background and valuable insights into the political situation for women, unfortunately just as relevant now as ever.

Sonali Kolhatkar: Afghanistan has experienced brutal war for the past 20 years — from the Soviet invasion and occupation, followed by a puppet regime installed by the Soviets, which was then toppled by the US-backed Mujahadeen. This was followed by brutal civil war and the Taliban's rule. Now we're seeing a bombing campaign by the United States. What has been the worst era for Afghans and why?

Tahmeena Faryal: I think that, first of all, I should make it clear that these eras are related one to the other. It is like a chain. Had the Soviets not invaded Afghanistan there would not have been the US-backed fundamentalists and the current Taliban. From our point of view, the real tragedy began with the Soviet invasion, but everything got worse, especially towards women, when the fundamentalists took power in 1992. There were eight parties from the very beginning who started fighting against each other and their main and easiest target was women.

Sonali: RAWA says the Northern Alliance is no better than the Taliban in terms of their human rights record, yet today the United States is supporting the Northern Alliance to advance its



RAWA rally in Islamabad, December 10, 2000...



war in Afghanistan. Should Afghans be afraid of the Northern Alliance taking over the country as they did in the early 1990s?

Tahmeena: The people of Afghanistan are really terrified of the Northern Alliance being part of any official government in Afghanistan. The period between 1992 and 1996, when they were in power, was really the blackest period in the history of Afghanistan. That was really the worst time and what made it even worse and more tragic was that there was no attention given to the situation. The Afghan people will not forget that time. People will not forget that the hospitals, schools, museums, and 70-80 per cent of the capital city of Kabul were destroyed during that time. Many cases of rape, women's abduction, forced marriages happened at that time. That would happen again if they take the power.

Sonali: RAWA appealed to the international community in terms of solving Afghanistan's problems of civil war, and the fundamentalism of the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. What was your appeal to the international community, and how has it changed after September 11th?

Tahmeena: RAWA warned in the early 1980s — when many different countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, United States, and France

started financially and militarily supporting the fundamentalists — that they were going to be a very dangerous phenomenon, not only for the people of Afghanistan and that region but for the whole world. RAWA had anticipated incidents such as September 11. With the nature those fundamentalists had and have, they would not even care about the countries that once aided and supported them, and there would be a slap on their faces, as we say in Persian. Unfortunately, that is what happened. RAWA has been calling for years for the United Nations to intervene with its peacekeeping force in order to disarm the armed groups, as well as to impose sanctions militarily on the countries that supply arms and financial support to the Taliban and the Northern Alliance.

Sonali: Such as Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates ...

Tahmeena: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Iran, Russia, India. We believe that if they really want to seek a solution, a real solution to the problems in Afghanistan, the first thing is to impose sanctions, again militarily, on the countries that support them.

Sonali: You mean stop the weapons sales?

Tahmeena: Yes, the weapons sales, and any financial or other support. And then disarm these

... where the Taliban attacked the demonstrators. Police resorted to teargas shelling and baton charging of RAWA activists.

Thousands of Afghan war-widows have no other option but to beg to save their children from hunger. Most people call Kabul "the city of beggars". Taliban would flog these ill-fated women in the streets because most of them have to leave their houses without a Mahram (close male relative), which was un-Islamic according to Taliban.



groups inside Afghanistan. As long as they are armed, and as long as they are supported by other countries, they're not going to stop fighting. That is in their nature. They love fighting.

Sonali: What is RAWA's position on the bombing campaign by the United States, especially in light of the US claim that the campaign's specific aim is to get rid of the Taliban?

Tahmeena: It is so unfortunate that all the attention on Afghanistan came only after September 11. Before that, it was the largest forgotten tragedy in the world. We welcome the combat against terrorism. In fact, this combat should have started years ago in order to prevent incidents like September 11. The people of Afghanistan have been the victims of the same hands for years, yet we never received any attention. It was as if people in Afghanistan deserved all those atrocities and crimes. But this combat against terrorism cannot be won by bombing this or that country. It should be a massive campaign to stop any country that sells arms or financially supports the fundamentalist movements or fundamentalist regimes. For example, right now in Pakistan there are thousands of religious schools with hundreds of thousands of religious students, and each and every one of them is going to be a future Osama. If this bombing can get at Osama or the Taliban or some of the terrorists' camps, this does not

mean they will prevent terrorist incidents in the future.

Sonali: In addition to the hundreds of people that have been directly killed by the bombs, many international aid agencies are warning about the mass starvation of Afghans. Seven million Afghans who were dependent on aid agencies supplying them with food are on the verge of starvation today. The bombing is preventing aid from getting to these people and UNICEF has estimated that 100,000 of the children will die this winter from starvation because we couldn't reach them with aid. How should the international community respond to this impending disaster which could eventually lead to millions of innocent Afghan deaths?

Tahmeena: Immediate humanitarian aid is the first thing that should be done. It is very easy to do that in Pakistan. Humanitarian organisations have trouble getting into Afghanistan because of the bombing. But thousands of refugees have fled to Pakistan, Iran and other neighbouring countries after September 11, and especially after the US bombing. It should not be very difficult for these humanitarian organisations to provide for those refugees. After September 11 more than 100,000 refugees came into Pakistan alone. Last year more than 100,000 refugees came into Pakistan fleeing from the drought and cold and war. This figure of seven million is from months ago. Even when Afghanistan was not being

bombed the humanitarian organisations could have done something significant to help these people not to die. Obviously we know that they are concerned, but they should act urgently. I mean, there are problems in Afghanistan, but at least the refugees in Pakistan or Tajikistan or Iran could be given humanitarian aid.

Sonali: When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 one of the pretexts they used was that they were coming in to liberate Afghan women from fundamentalism. Today the United States government and supporters of the bombing campaign in Afghanistan seem to be using RAWA's documentation of fundamentalist oppression of women to justify the bombing campaign. Can you comment on this manipulation of women's issues by foreign occupiers and foreign interventionists in Afghanistan?

Tahmeena: First of all I should say that during the Soviet invasion and its puppet regime there were claims that women's situation in Afghanistan improved, but that is not true. The situation of women in Afghanistan was really beginning to improve in the early 20th century. Even before the former king women had the very basic right of getting an education. We had women in government and we had the right to work. What the Soviets were trying to do was give women some of the rights that are obviously okay in western societies but are not acceptable in our societies. For example, they wanted to give the so-called liberties of having a boyfriend, or dancing in a nightclub, which are not acceptable in our society. You really cannot bring all those changes overnight. We really need to start from

the very basic things, like giving them education, which is what RAWA has been doing — trying to give women an awareness of their real potential.

Sonali: RAWA doesn't receive any support from governments. Why is that? Would RAWA accept governmental aid if it were offered?

Tahmeena: The reason that RAWA does not enjoy regular governmental support is, I guess, because of our firm political standpoints and perhaps because of the word 'revolutionary' in our name. We've always made it very clear that in a country like Afghanistan, which is very much male-dominated, the existence of an independent women's organisation is in itself revolutionary. RAWA is not in favour of armed struggle or violence. Once we approached the British Embassy in Pakistan. They said: 'If you change this word in your name, we might be able to give you some support.' Other times we have been openly told that if we change this or that policy we might be able to get some financial support. RAWA would not mind getting support from governments, as long as we don't have to compromise our policies. That has not been possible so far.

Sonali: What is the ethnic makeup of RAWA's members? Do they represent the myriad ethnic groups in Afghanistan?

Tahmeena: Members of RAWA — and we have around 2,000 core members — come from very diverse backgrounds and ethnic groups. We have Hazaras, we have Pashtuns, we have Tajiks, we have Uzbeks, we have Pashai, Nooristani, and

A poem by Meena, founder of RAWA

I'll Never Return

I'm the woman who has awoken
I've arisen and become a tempest through the ashes of my burnt children
I've arisen from the rivulets of my brother's blood
My nation's wrath has empowered me
My ruined and burnt villages fill me with hatred against the enemy
Oh compatriot, no longer regard me weak and incapable,
My voice has mingled with thousands of arisen women
My fists are clenched with fists of thousands compatriots
To break all these sufferings all these fetters of slavery.
I'm the woman who has awoken,
I've found my path and will never return.

Afghanistan
Afghanistan

Afghanistan
Afghanistan

people coming from the very remote areas of Afghanistan.

Sonali: Does RAWA discuss economic models of development in any future stable and peaceful Afghanistan and, if so, what economic models are those?

Tahmeena: RAWA has not discussed economic infrastructure. Maybe we should discuss it at this point. Obviously if RAWA is part of any future government, it should have its own agenda for economic and other structures in Afghanistan. So far we've just talked about democracy and human rights and women's rights. I think RAWA would want an economic structure that would guarantee that people in Afghanistan can live equally. That all the starvation, the lack of education, and the lack of basic health services that we have witnessed in

Afghanistan — not only during the war, but also before that — shouldn't happen again. Especially lack of education. I think that should be the most important issue.

Sonali: I recently read that the World Bank is promising to aid reconstruction in Afghanistan. How do you think Afghans would react to the presence of foreign corporations?

Tahmeena: We definitely need international cooperation and support. Without the international community I don't think that the people or any future government in Afghanistan would be able to rebuild the country. But a puppet regime, or



domination by another country, would not be accepted by the people of Afghanistan.

Sonali: What kind of security issues would RAWA face if RAWA is included in some sort of future government of Afghanistan?

Tahmeena: A democratic government, or relatively democratic government, is the only type of government we would be willing to take part in. We cannot take part in a government that is led by the fundamentalists. These two scenarios have different security implications for RAWA. If we achieve the idea that women can be part of society, then we won't have these

threats from the fundamentalists and we won't have to work in secret.

Sonali: Does RAWA have relationships with other women's movements in the world in different international conflicts?

Tahmeena: Since 1997, when we first started our website and established contact with people around the world, we have been in contact with hundreds of women's organisations. Most of these contacts are through email or our website. We would like to have more contact with some of the countries that were at war or in conflict or still are, but many of them do not have access to internet or email. We enjoy the support of groups in this country [the US] in many different ways. We have seen the impact in saving maybe thousands of lives and educating thousands of children in Afghanistan thanks to financial and other support from these groups.

Sonali: You've been a member of RAWA for most of your adult life — and it's a very difficult life to be part of an underground revolutionary organisation that faces so much opposition from these incredibly powerful and armed fundamentalist groups. What keeps you and the other members of RAWA going?

Tahmeena: When you live in a country where you see the people lose everything and you see the women in your country going through the most horrible experiences one can imagine, you cannot keep quiet, if you have a little bit of consciousness. You need to do something. I think the main reason so many women, educated women, committed suicide in Afghanistan, was because they did not have contact with an organisation like RAWA. They found themselves totally helpless and hopeless and felt that had no options, so they committed suicide. I might have been one of them had I not had contact with RAWA, had I not worked with RAWA. But when you do something that you know is effective and that saves lives, you get energy from that, and continue with it.

Also, I think our members inspire each other. Obviously we are all inspired by the founding leader of RAWA, Meena. In fact Meena was always telling other RAWA members that even if she was not among us one day others should continue what she started. It is also very strengthening and heartening that we have the support of the international community. When we feel the support from people, especially women, all over the world — like women who walk in order to raise awareness and money, or people who go on hunger strikes to raise money for RAWA, or the committed supporters we have in this country, like Afghan Women's Mission — that is really such a source of hope and energy. It's really important to know that you're not alone, that there are other people who care.

Sonali: What can ordinary people who believe in RAWA's vision of democracy, freedom, and women's rights in Afghanistan do to help RAWA?

Tahmeena: Financial support is the most meaningful and practical way to help, especially given the humanitarian and refugee crisis we have. People can support RAWA's educational projects, humanitarian projects or healthcare services. Also, especially at this time, political involvement is very important. By writing letters to the representatives of their government and the United Nations, people can put a pressure on them that would be difficult to ignore. The main issue should be the bombing — that this cannot do the job of stopping terrorism. The real combat against terrorism should be done by stopping any financial and military support to the countries that harbour terrorists or fundamentalist, by disarming the groups in Afghanistan and by not including the Northern Alliance in a future government. Women should be a part of any future government of Afghanistan. These are the most important issues that people can write to their representatives about. □

Financial support for RAWA can be sent through the Afghan Women's Mission at www.afghanwomensmission.org. This interview was originally published in *Said It: Feminist News Culture and Politics* www.saidit.org.

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In women's name?

After September 11, we were told that one of the reasons the 'civilised' west was going to war against Al-Qaida and the Taliban was to restore women's rights in Afghanistan. But this is doubly disingenuous, argues feminist human rights campaigner Purna Sen. It is not only the war that is bringing further devastation to women's lives in Afghanistan. The western leaders who are the new power-brokers in the region ignore the voices of women and promote an ideal of 'freedom' — including the normalisation of prostitution and the consumption of western pornography — which is antithetical to women's interests.

Taliban rule brought misery, formalised gender discrimination, isolation, curtailment of movement, removal from employment and education, and violence to Afghan women. Much of this was known to women across the world who sought to bring the offences of Taliban rule to the attention of the west and did not focus only on the shroud of *burqa*.

We know, for example, some of the atrocities carried out in the Stadium: the scene of state sponsored executions. Women accused of prostitution would be brought here to be killed, perhaps, as *The Guardian* reported on February 4 2002, by being 'forced to kneel against the goalpost ... and shot in the back of the head at close range'. Such accounts are not as new to us

as they may be to the western journalists who have been in a frenzy since September 2001 to report on such atrocities.

Evidence of the trauma women have suffered in this context has been provided by a number of medical studies on depression and suicide. The World Health Organisation found that 97 per cent of women showed signs of depression and 86 per cent suffered symptoms of anxiety. In 2001 Physicians for Human Rights found that 65 per cent of women living in Taliban-controlled areas had persistent thoughts of suicide.

But horrendous accounts are still surfacing. We knew, for example, that women brought us accounts of trafficking and forced marriage, but in 2002 we hear more details about young women



who were forced to 'marry' and were then raped and discarded by Taliban and Al-Qaida men.

Ethnic minority women from Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara were targeted for trafficking and sexual slavery: as many as 600 women are reported to be missing from one region of the country. Even the (interim) Ministry of Justice acknowledges that many abducted women would be difficult to trace as many have been killed.

After the atrocity of 11 September in the US, George Bush announced, mistakenly as it turned out, a crusade by the civilised worlds against the terrorist, warmongering Taliban and Al-Qaida network. Though this soon publicly stopped being a crusade, nothing in its nature changed — except that the western alliance belatedly discovered women. Not only that, but they suddenly sought to challenge the Taliban on their treatment of women ... or so we were asked to believe.

New power-brokers, new problems

Six months of bombing have now passed and the Taliban government has fallen. All should be promising and optimistic in Afghanistan for women but it is not so. No, it is not only the troubled process of transition that brings women continued problems but the 'freedom' and liberties of the western systems themselves.

At the government level, despite there being a

addressing at national policy and provision levels positive changes for women. But this ministry is the only one that has no pre-existing resources.

Donors, that is the western industrialised nations who also happened to be key players in the war against Afghanistan, have yet to fund the Ministry for Women's Affairs adequately to fulfil its role.

The war itself and the devastation it wreaked have hugely increased the casualties and the physical insecurities Afghans face. It is said that about 3,000 people have been killed during the last six months' bombing; that's roughly the number who were killed in the World Trade Centre: is that a moral equivalence?

There are estimates that up to 60 per cent of surviving women are widows. They and other women have severely compromised earning opportunities and little representation at the international negotiating tables — where the geopolitical giants are in control. International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) representing women were reportedly kept out of a donors' meeting in Tokyo. The convenors of this meeting were the US, the European Union, Britain, Saudi Arabia, the United Nations and the World Bank. Twenty-six Afghan NGOs were permitted to participate — of which three were led by women.

The economic devastation of war is, as

female deputy prime minister, the Ministry for Women's Affairs does not have adequate resources to begin operations. The ministry will presumably seek to make changes for Afghan women and girls though a structure approved and put in place by the western powers. The ministry exists and therefore is the first step towards

provision levels positive changes for women. But this ministry is the only one that has no pre-existing resources.

Donors, that is the western industrialised nations who also happened to be key players in the war against Afghanistan, have yet to fund the Ministry for Women's Affairs adequately to fulfil its role.

The war itself and the devastation it wreaked have hugely increased the casualties and the physical insecurities Afghans face. It is said that about 3,000 people have been killed during the last six months' bombing; that's roughly the number who were killed in the World Trade Centre: is that a moral equivalence?

There are estimates that up to 60 per cent of surviving women are widows. They and other women have severely compromised earning opportunities and little representation at the international negotiating tables — where the geopolitical giants are in control. International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) representing women were reportedly kept out of a donors' meeting in Tokyo. The convenors of this meeting were the US, the European Union, Britain, Saudi Arabia, the United Nations and the World Bank. Twenty-six Afghan NGOs were permitted to participate — of which three were led by women.

The economic devastation of war is, as

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always, a superimposition on pre-existing discrimination against women. There have been several recent reports of families selling children to raise money to buy food. Girls in older childhood may be sold into marriage; younger children, especially boys, are sold to complete a family with only daughters. Unsurprisingly, boy children often sell for a higher price than girls, as families who have only daughters will pay a premium to shape their family in a socially acceptable fashion. It is said that boys fetch from \$30 to \$60; in February this year the Associated Press reported a 12-year-old girl had been sold for £50.

One aspect of life in the brave new post-Taliban world that is the new Afghanistan is especially worrying, because it will not be challenged or even rhetorically questioned by the new power-brokers, the western leaders. That area is the introduction of pornography. After the fall of the Taliban television and broadcasting were re-introduced to the country. Up to 170 satellite stations are beaming their wares into the country. Four of these channels show only pornography and although these channels are

reportedly nowhere near as bald and 'hard core' as much of what we are accustomed to in the west, they bring a whole new world to the Afghans. There are many parts of the country in which women between puberty and old age still venture out only in burqas, where virginity at marriage is absolutely required of women, where conservative and traditional frameworks govern and impose heterosexual norms. Access to naked women performing for men on widely available television channels is unheard of, but according to a report in the *New York Times* (15 February 2002) it is predictably growing in popularity — with men.

In August 2000 Ann Summers (the UK chain of sex shops) announced they were to open shops in a number of locations in the middle east, including Kuwait, Saudi (in Mecca), Dubai, Bahrain, Egypt, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and possibly Oman. I think we should not be surprised to hear that Kabul will be added to this list; already Larry Flynt (*Hustler* magazine) has tried to secure entry to Afghanistan with US troops. The thought of this man and other pornographers accessing this country of vulnerable women and hungry men accustomed to formalised systems of hatred for women is frightening.

Disingenuous claims

What a real change it would be if women were to have a say in what would be best for women. If the superpowers might lend them an ear perhaps then would we see such developments really being challenged. In the meantime there is a clear message: if the changes brought to society in Afghanistan fit the model of western normality, which includes pornography and prostitution, then all is well. But if discrimination against and hatred of women takes other forms it cannot be tolerated.

Instead, what we see is the disingenuousness of the claim that the west went to war for women. Women's interests have had little profile whether at the 'peace' table, in the fight for resources or in the shaping of social life post-Taliban. But even more strikingly, were women to be the real interests in a war or in political life, we would see a war on Saudi Arabia, would we not?

For several years I have worked in and on human rights for women, especially in relation to the elimination of violence against women. We get ever more sophisticated in our language, arguments and contests with the state in a

variety of contexts. It is a useful and stark reminder occasionally to be grounded by the reality of claims for very basic rights that are still to be won, not only but certainly in Afghanistan.

In June 2000 a Conference for Women of Afghanistan was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Organised by the Association to Support the Women of Afghanistan (NEGAR, based in France), the conference brought together Afghan women from the US and Europe, more than 250 Afghan refugee women from Tajikistan and Iran, women from inside Afghanistan, and 45 non-Afghans. This group produced a Declaration of the Essential Rights of Afghan Women that listed ten fundamental rights of women. Though crafted for the Afghan context, much of it is relevant and speaks to women in many circumstances and in many parts of the world.

Declaration of the Essential Rights of Afghan Women

The fundamental right of Afghan women, as for all human beings, is life with dignity, which includes the following rights:

- 1 the right to equality between men and women and the right to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and segregation, based on gender, race or religion
- 2 the right to personal safety and to freedom from torture or inhumane or degrading treatment
- 3 the right to physical and mental health for women and their children
- 4 the right to equal protection under the law
- 5 the right to institutional education in all the intellectual and physical disciplines
- 6 the right to just and favourable conditions of work
- 7 the right to move about freely and independently
- 8 the right to freedom of thought, speech, assembly and political participation
- 9 the right to wear or not to wear the chadari (burqa) or the scarf
- 10 the right to participate in cultural activities including theatre, music and sports. □

Give me security, then I will remove my burqa

Mazar-I-Sharif, Afghanistan. 4 February 2002: The fall of the Taliban has brought an unexpected windfall to stall holders in this northern Afghan city: sales of burqas are skyrocketing. The burqa, an all-encompassing garment women were forced to wear by the Taliban, was seen as a symbol of the oppression exerted by the fundamentalist regime. But now the Taliban have been driven from power sales could not be better, said a delighted Uduf Qarizada at his stall in the Mandavi market. 'Under the Taliban I sold approximately 50 per day, now it's up to 120-140,' he said. Mondays and Thursdays are the best for sales when villagers descend from the surrounding mountains to do their shopping in this city of about 200,000 people. 'I sell much more burqas than before because the women are now free to go out alone and choose their clothing for themselves,' another stallholder, Karim Wahid, said. With the lifting of the strictly enforced Taliban laws, Wahid finds he has 'more sales and thus more money'.

In his office several blocks away, city mayor and former fighter Ishaq Raequzar said one of the first directives after the Taliban fled was 'to give women permission to work everywhere, including in official organisations'. This order, plus the arrival of international aid, the presence of many humanitarian organisations and the return of refugees from Iran and Pakistan, gave a small boost to the economy. Schools for girls, music and kites, all prohibited under the Taliban's puritanical interpretation of Islam, have reappeared in the rejuvenated city, but the burqa remains essential for most women at present. 'Give me security, then I will remove my burqa,' said 40-year-old Nasrim. Hidden beneath her white garment, with a small mesh area in front of the eyes to look through, she told of crimes by the soldiers now in control of the city after the Taliban left and before the arrival of foreign troops.

Source: RAWA.

Afghan women organise

Sue O'Sullivan and Isabel Ros López present here a list and brief description of groups working with women in Afghanistan and the area (including organisations headquartered in other countries but working either in exile or in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan). The list is not complete, but gives some flavour of how Afghan women have been organising on their own behalf.

Not surprisingly there has been a proliferation of organisations around the world that aim to address the needs of women in Afghanistan: new organisations and ones established by existing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or governments. The United Nations is also pursuing strategies to incorporate gender issues into Afghan reconstruction endeavours. All of this work is focused on Afghan women's needs. However, differing political positions on women's liberation, religion, culture and economic development inform this work. Not all are feminist. Wherever possible there is a trail of contact information to enable interested readers to find out more about these groups and their work.

Afghan Institute of Learning

The Afghan Institute of Learning was founded in 1995 to help address the problem of a lack of educational access for women and girls, their subsequent inability to support their lives, and the impact of this lack of education on society and culture. The goal of the three founders — Sakena Yacoobi (a health educator and teacher), Nazifa Aabedi (an engineer and teacher), and Parwin Rahim (a health educator and nurse) — was to create an organisation run by women that could play a major part in reconstructing an educational system capable of reaching the women and children of Afghanistan, whether in refugee camps or still in their homes.

PO Box 1058, Dearborn, MI 48121, USA. Phone: 313 271 6213 Fax: 313 565 8515

Maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan is the second highest in the world, with an estimated 15,000 women dying each year from pregnancy-related causes. *

Afghan Women's Educational Centre

Founded by a group of Afghan women in 1991 in Islamabad, AWEC is a non-profit, non-political organisation of Afghan refugee women. It aims to promote educational programmes for Afghan refugee women and children and support women's groups to gain self-reliance and empowerment. AWEC aims to assist all Afghan women, regardless of class, to enhance their skills, further their education, raise awareness of their rights and privileges and promote their freedom to better use community resources and play their role in building a just society on return to their country. AWEC also supports schools and provides counselling.

pal@awn.sdnpk.undp.org

It is estimated that only 23 percent of the population has access to safe water and only 12 percent to adequate sanitation. *

Afghan Women's Fund

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children has created a fund to support Afghan women's groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan as they respond to the critical humanitarian needs of Afghan refugee women. They distribute grants and provide technical assistance to the groups to ensure co-ordination and monitoring of projects. They collaborate with United Nations and non-governmental relief and development organisations. They have worked with local groups to monitor the situation for Afghan refugee and internally displaced women and girls for the past decade. Their technical advisor is based in Peshawar, Pakistan.

www.womenscommission.org

At least 15,000 Afghans die of tuberculosis every year, of whom 64 per cent are women. *

Afghan Women's Network

Based in Peshawar, the AWN is a non-political, non-profit organisation. Its aim is to promote solidarity and co-operation amongst Afghan woman and support their capacity to enhance their self-reliance and attain their rights. Established in 1996, its members include Afghan women living as refugees in Pakistan and Afghan women working in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghan Women's Network welcomes enquiries and support. It has more than 150 members.

awn@brain.net.pk

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Useful sources of up-to-date information

www.stopworldwar3.com
 Media Workers Against the War: www.mwaw.org
 Human and Civil Rights Organisations: www.hcr.org
 Medecins Sans Frontieres: www.msf.org
 Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org
 Amnesty International: www.amnesty.org ☐

Malnutrition of women, which negatively affects pregnancies and deliveries, as well as the health of children, is not only caused by the food scarcity linked to the conflict and the drought, but is also related to traditional preference for males, which makes women reduce their own food allowance in favour of men and children. *

NEGAR — Support of Women of Afghanistan

An international organisation working for the restoration of the rights of Afghan women.
 negar@wanadoo.fr

During the Taliban regime, only about three per cent of girls received some form of primary education. *

Afghanistan Women's Council

The AWC was founded in 1986 by Fatana Gailani with the aims to restore to Afghan women and girls the right to employment and education, rehabilitate the Afghan people through peaceful political processes and establish friendships with similar organisations in countries worldwide. It also publishes the monthly Zan-e-Afghan [Afghan Women] to mobilise Afghan women to bring peace and stability to the country. It runs a 20-bed hospital for women and children in Kabul City and operates the Ariana School and Mother and Child Health Clinic in Peshawar, Pakistan.

www.afghanwomenssupport.org/afghanwomenscouncil.html

The newly formed transitional Ministry for Women's Affairs is the only ministry without pre-existing resources. Rights and Democracy, a Canadian group, is providing emergency funds of \$50,000 to help establish the Afghan department of Women's Affairs in Kabul. Despite promises of foreign aid to rebuild Afghanistan, the Ministry for Women's Affairs has not yet received any funds. ‡

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan

Established in Kabul in 1977, RAWA is an independent, political and social organisation of Afghan women fighting for human rights and for social justice in Afghanistan. Not advocating violence, RAWA campaigns for women's rights and provides education and health facilities and programmes. Most of its operations are based in refugee areas in Pakistan. RAWA's objective is to involve an increasing number of Afghan women in social and political activities aimed at achieving women's human rights and contributing to the struggle for the establishment of a government in Afghanistan based on democratic and secular values. To this end RAWA is involved in varied socio-political activities including education, health and income generation as well as political agitation.

www.rawa.org

The war and militarisation of society led to an increased number of abductions of young girls and women by Taliban fighters. It is difficult to obtain exact numbers as families have been reluctant to come forward and report cases of abductions for fear of reprisals and because of the social stigma attached to a daughter or sister having been kidnapped or sold for sex. *

Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan

WAPHA is a non-partisan, non-profit, independent organisation founded by Zieba Shorish-Shamley. Its aim is to promote awareness of the human rights situation in Afghanistan and to advocate for social, political, economic and civil rights of Afghan women and girls. WAPHA's objectives are: to bring the 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, and to advocate human rights on behalf of the Afghan people with an emphasis on women and children. WAPHA aims to raise public consciousness and keep the issues alive by speaking to magazines, newspapers, radio, television and other public sources. They also participate and present papers in academic seminars and conferences and organise demonstrations and international appeals to the United Nations, and members of the international community involved in Afghanistan.

www.wapha.org

Only five per cent of women are able to read and write. *

Women Living under Muslim Laws

WLUML is an international network that provides information, solidarity and support for all women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam. The network aims to increase the autonomy of women by supporting the local struggles of women from within Muslim countries and communities and linking them with feminist and progressive groups at large, facilitating interaction, exchanges and contacts, providing information, and acting as a channel of communication. For more than 15 years WLUML has linked women in over 40 Muslim countries and communities with the aim of strengthening their local and individual struggles. WLUML bases its website and news releases of their eyewitness reports and the network's monitoring of the new media.

www.wluml.org

Feminist Majority Foundation president Eleanor Smeal announced: 'We are pleased that a building has now been given to the Ministry [for Women] and that USAID is currently funding the rehabilitation of some parts of the Women's Ministry building. However, substantial resources for the Ministry are needed if it is to adequately establish the crucial legal advocacy, education, vocational training and women's health programs necessary to begin to undo the devastation caused by the Taliban regime and the 23 years of unending war.' †

Notes

* From Discrimination against Women and Girls in Afghanistan, a report from the Secretary-General of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, 28 January 2002

† From Feminist Majority Foundation (USA), 7 March, 2002

‡ From Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 13 February, 2002

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A living draft for Afghan women's rights

Following 11 September and the subsequent overthrow of the Taliban, international coalitions produced several declarations seeking to ensure women's rights were not forgotten as global powers determined the future government of Afghanistan. The one described below received especially little international attention.

Women activists and scholars from Afghanistan, the Middle East and other countries that have experienced war, armed conflict and revolution came together in Montreal in November 2001 to discuss the situation of women in Afghanistan. The meeting was sponsored by the Simone de Beauvoir Institute and organised by Women Living Under Muslim Laws

The meeting aimed to facilitate a discussion on the current situation, the needs of Afghan women and to identify steps that would ensure that Afghan women's voices are heard in national and international discussions concerning the current situation and the future of Afghanistan and that Afghan women are themselves represented in all such forums.

WLUML invited all human rights and women's organizations, social action groups, anti-war activists, and civil society in general, to extend or add to the main thrust of the document and to distribute it as widely as possible to mobilize support for the immediate involvement of Afghan women in all post-conflict discussions, policy formulations, and reconstruction initiatives for Afghanistan.

The meeting led to the drawing up of a 'living

draft' of Afghan women's rights. The following are edited excerpts of the meeting's main areas of concern.

Consultation

For every formal/informal consultation that takes place with Afghan men/leaders/soldiers/warlords/tribesmen, consultations must also be held with women community leaders/activists/intellectuals/NGOs, of which there are many in Afghanistan, and among Afghan refugee and displaced populations. Of great importance, the UN and US-led coalition envoys must include women. This would in turn facilitate inclusion of Afghan women in the process.

Peacekeeping

Work to ensure that peacekeeping operational mandates specify consultation with, and the protection of, local women when designing and implementing humanitarian and development programmes. Every effort must be made to avoid top-down approaches or consulting only those perceived as male powerbrokers since this greatly deters local participation and contributes to a lack of trust, in turn often leading to the failure of these programmes.

Post-Taliban constitution

To safeguard and ensure women's rights, the constitution should not only guarantee equal rights of women and men in all spheres of family, social, economic and public life; it should also recognise the following principles and clearly enunciate them in the constitution:

- women should be actively encouraged and supported to participate fully in the political, economic and social life of Afghan society, including by affirmative action measures
- any national law (including family code) that takes away the rights given to women by the constitution should be void
- to ensure a voice for women at all level of government, one third of the total seats in the Afghan government should be reserved for Afghan women by direct election at all national and local elections, for a specified period of time (ie. 30 years). [Pakistan, following some other South Asian countries, has adopted a reserved seats system that can be used as a model]
- in line with encouraging women's participation, and given the gender segregation among some segments of Afghan society, elected women's jirgas (caucus/councils) should be instituted at national, provincial and local (city/town/village/tribal) levels. These jirgas should assume responsibility for monitoring and researching local and national issues such as education/welfare/environment/health. They will also be responsible for ensuring that the human development budget is equitably allocated between men and women. Some funds should be earmarked for decision and administration by the women's jirga
- women's right to gainful economic activity and mobility should be guaranteed.

Family laws

Given that family law is among the most important codes determining the position of women in any society, a special task force of women experts and activists and women's organisations from Afghanistan and the international community — particularly from Muslim countries (Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Muslim Women's Research and Actions Forum in Sri Lanka, Shirkat Gah in Pakistan, the Roshdieh Institute in Iran, Sisters in Islam in Malaysia, among others) should be set up to look at past experiences and expertise and to suggest guidelines for a family code. One of the concerns

Time line

11 September 2001 Attack on New York and Washington

7 October 2001 Beginning of US and Allied military attacks on Afghanistan

November 2001 The Taliban leave Kabul and the Northern Alliance enters the city

7 November 2001 Afghan women from various NGOs form the Afghan Women's Network in Peshawar, Pakistan

20 November 2001 The newly formed Union of Women in Afghanistan is informed by the then Minister of the Interior of the United Front that a march through Kabul on 20 and 27 November 2001 cannot proceed because of security concerns

27 November 2001 The Bonn Meeting convenes with the aim of forming a transitional administration in Afghanistan and deciding on the country's long-term needs after the end of Taliban rule. Only three women participate as full delegates: two linked to the former King and one as part of the Northern Alliance delegation. Two other women participate as advisors: one to the Cyprus Group and another to the Peshawar Group. Although women from RAWA ask to be included in the Bonn meetings they are ignored and excluded

4-5 December 2001 Afghan Women's Summit for Democracy in Brussels

11 December 2001 Women gather in Brussels in solidarity with the Afghan Women's Summit

22 December 2001 Transfer of power ceremonies in Kabul when the interim administration takes office. The 'Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions' states that the interim administration be composed 'with due regard to the ethnic, geographic and religious composition of Afghanistan and to the importance of the participation of women'. Two women are appointed: the Ministry of Women's Affairs is headed by Sima Samar, a physician and founder of the Shudhada Organisation network of clinics, hospitals and schools in Pakistan and central Afghanistan, and the Minister of Public Health is Suhaila Siddiq, a surgeon who continued to practise in Kabul throughout the Taliban regime

January 2002 Mr Karzai, head of the Interim Administration, signs the 'Declaration of the Essential Rights of Afghan Women' that affirms the rights to equality between men and women (reproduced in Purna Sen's article, see p 15).

21-22 January 2002 The International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan, held in Tokyo, is convened by the US, European Union, Britain, Saudi Arabia, the United Nations and the World Bank. International NGOs representing women are not allowed to attend. Only three women-led NGOs are included among the 26 Afghan NGOs attending the conference. The UN and World Bank proposal classifies women as a 'vulnerable population'

Chronology information RAWA, Women Living Under Muslim Laws and www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/afghanistan/timeline/intro.html

of this working task force will be to devise a family code that will reinforce equity and will not compromise the rights granted women by the constitution. A democratic family code and family structure is an important tool for ensuring a democratic society.

Female education

To ensure that women will have access to education, which in turn will ensure their active participation in rebuilding Afghan society, teacher training (including adult education) must be established immediately and also colleges for women to create the pool of teachers needed for educating women and female children. Particular efforts must be made to address the remedial educational needs of girls and young women denied education in recent years. A curriculum based on gender equity must be developed as an integral part of these programmes. A mechanism must be put in place to ensure women have equitable access to higher education. Fifty percent of medical school seats should be reserved for women to ensure access of women and children to healthcare.

After the Taliban

Women Still Under Threat: Human Rights Watch, 9 May 2002. Afghan women continue to fear physical violence and insecurity even after the end of the Taliban regime. Sexual violence by armed factions and public harassment tied to repressive Taliban-era edicts continue to restrict women in their movement, expression and dress, Human Rights Watch said in a new briefing paper released today.

'Women can only participate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan if they can be physically safe,' said LaShawn R. Jefferson, executive director of the Women's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch. 'The international community must act now to end violence against women.'

The 11-page briefing paper, 'Taking Cover: Women in Post-Taliban Afghanistan,' documents cases of attacks and threats against women that include rape and other acts of sexual violence and their effect on women's participation in civil society.

Since the end of Taliban rule in Afghanistan in November 2001, women and girls have had growing access to education, health care, and employment. At the same time, many Afghan women still live in an environment in which personal physical security is constantly under threat. The Human Rights Watch briefing paper documents a number of cases of sexual violence in the northern city of Mazar-i Sharif, including gang-rapes.

Many women continue to limit their movements and to wear a burqa, the head-to-toe enveloping garment, for their physical security, even though the Taliban-era edict requiring women to wear the burqa is no longer in force.

The briefing paper is available online at: <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/wrd/afghan-women-2k2.htm>

Health and reproductive rights

Access to health care is a human right. Currently Afghan women and children's health status is among the worst in the international community. There should be immediate training of medical and para-medical personnel, particularly in the areas of reproductive health and child health, in order to respond to this urgent situation.

Drawing on previous and ongoing successful initiatives in the region as a model, health initiatives should invite the support of organisations such as Médecins sans Frontières, Save the Children Fund, UNICEF, Medact, and the World Health Organisation, which have experience in Afghanistan. Experienced Afghan medical personnel, particularly women, and the large number of Afghan volunteer health workers in Iran can provide valuable contributions.

Housing, land and job training

Given the substantial number of households headed by women, all national and international funds for the reconstruction of Afghan society must give priority to employment training, housing and land titles for women directly. Women must be prioritised in shelter programmes and their particular needs met. Every effort should be made to ensure that women in all corners of Afghanistan have access to these programmes.

National media

Special care should be exercised in the representation of women and women's roles in society in the local Afghan media. The media must help challenge ideologies that discriminate against women.

Mobilisation and leadership training

Funds should be made available to experienced Afghan women's organisations and international women's organisations to organise leadership training for Afghan women in order to promote the establishment of an active civil society as well as to establish or expand NGOs operating on behalf of women.

The information in this section came from WLUML. Any comments and feedback should be sent to: livingdraft@wluml.org □

Defensive and divided

Southall Black Sisters was set up in 1979 as a casework, campaigning and advocacy organisation for Black and minority women. The focus of its work is on the needs of Asian women in the face of domestic violence and related issues such as forced marriages, honour killings, homelessness, policing, and constraints placed on women's freedom by immigration and asylum law and racism. Here Pragna Patel, a founding member of Southall Black Sisters, describes the impact of 11 September and after on the women coming to them for help and the Southall Asian community.

One of the interesting things about the aftermath of 11 September and the wider public debates around how it impacts here in the UK is that women have been left out generally. Soon after 11 September Southall Black Sisters (SBS) held a meeting of women users to talk about how they felt and how they had been affected by the events. Many of the women felt anxious about the rise of racism in our communities. The women who use our centres are from all the backgrounds represented in the Indian subcontinent. All the major religions are represented, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. As an organisation we have tried to foster a space for women to bridge the differences and emphasise the similarities between us. At this particular meeting, regardless of whether women were Muslim, Sikh or Hindu, what they were anxious

about was the effects in terms of increased racism.

Personally, and other women workers have said the same, 11 September affected us in a way that we had never felt before in the sense that walking down the street you felt very conscious about being different. Of course we see, smell, and are generally aware of differences in our society in terms of inequality and injustice, but this time it felt different — it felt very personal. People were looking at you as if to say, 'We don't trust you', 'We don't want you here'.

What is much more overt and obvious is that, because of the colour of your skin, it didn't matter that you weren't Muslim; you were open to attack as a group, as Asians, and that is something the women also expressed. After 11 September there were instances of Asians being

attacked regardless of religion because they were just deemed to be Muslim. At the meeting, Muslim women expressed fears about wearing the hijab in public but all the women who were present felt afraid of wearing any kind of Asian clothing which made them stand out. A number of women of different religious backgrounds talked about being verbally abused on the streets and others had children who were abused on the streets and in their schools.

Changing dynamics

The political dynamics have been changed in two ways. We have seen an incredible move towards the right, politically. One example is the rise in Oldham and Bradford of the BNP, so much so that they are now about to gain seats in the local authority elections. The BNP fomented and exploited the racism against the Muslims who live there. The way they did that has contributed to their rise just as much as the very real issues of poverty, lack of housing and so forth in these northern cities. Then you have the spectre of Le Pen winning the election in France. These right wing voices have become more legitimate through the adoption of much of their rhetoric, especially on immigration, by the main political parties. It's as though it's okay now to express racism because Muslims, and by association all Asian people, are potential terrorists.

The other way things have changed is that the Asian community has become much more segregated. We have always struggled to maintain SBS as a secular organisation, to promote a secular society and secular values and provide a space where women respect each other's religious backgrounds. But the dynamics that are working within our communities are eroding secular values and that secular ethos and we notice that in Southall. We have always struggled against what we call 'communalism' — the separation of South Asian people into distinct and sectarian religious camps, assumed to be homogenous groups, in opposition to each other. It has been important to us within a community like Southall that is fairly mixed to maintain that mix and have a healthy respect for it. September 11 has had a devastating impact on the unity of the community. It's not just September 11; there was already a trend, but it has increased the divisions between the community. Muslims now come together as Muslims, Sikhs as Sikhs, Hindus as Hindus.

It's now a struggle to even identify as Asian.

After 11 September an Asian radio station operating from Southall was bombarded with calls from Sikh and Hindu people asking them not to use the word 'Asian.' They felt that the term tarnished them because it associated them with Muslims. They asked the station to differentiate between the religious groups. The sub-text was that Muslims were the problem. Groups like the BNP have cottoned on to this and have similarly said in Oldham that Sikhs and Hindus aren't the problem; Muslims are the problem.

One of the success stories of Asian women organising in this country is that they have crossed the divides of racial identity, religion and culture so the struggles have benefited all and brought these communities together. Women have played an enormous role in uniting communities, although that's not to say women aren't also actively involved in these religious fundamentalist groups. But it has affected all groups. You will no longer hear, 'This is an Asian woman talking about issues that affect Asian communities'. You will hear, 'This is a Muslim woman talking about Muslim issues'. Actually the Asian community has far more that unites it: shared beliefs, values, culture, language, food, notions of honour and shame — these things are all shared across the communities irrespective of religious background. This identity based solely around religious identity becomes an exclusive identity and disallows alliances and political action based on unity.

There was no one among the women coming to our centres who supported the attack on the World Trade Centre. You don't condone the taking of civilian lives in that way, but people also understand there are double standards at play and the US is the arch player in this in the way in which it actually engineers these situations. The Taliban is a creature of the US, and then to engineer that war in the name of freedom and democracy and women's rights doesn't cut any ice with the women from those regions. We have women who are from Afghanistan coming to the centre. They understand clearly that the Taliban as a regime was an abhorrent and misogynistic regime and that women were targeted, but at the same time they also understand that the US did not help and turned a blind eye in creating the Taliban and knew the implications of the regime in terms of women's rights and freedoms. Then suddenly after September 11, the world woke up to the

persecution of women when women had been struggling for years, yet their voices went unheard. And yet the US, the UK and the others who fought this 'just' war ignored their plight. We see in our daily work how hard it is for women fleeing persecution as women to get refugee status. It's an area we have struggled to reform so that refugee laws recognise gender persecution, which is what this war was about. The irony is that the refugee law in this country was not accepting Afghan refugees when it went to war and only recognised gender persecution to a limited extent.

Global connections

It's hard to say if September 11 has had a direct impact on our work. The numbers of women facing or experiencing forced marriages who come to us for help have definitely increased but whether that is a direct result of September 11 is not an easy question to answer. What we can say is that boundaries around identity have become more tightly drawn, whether you are Muslim, Sikh or Hindu. I think one of the effects has been to increase the need for cultural and religious self preservation and a heightened sense of identity, and that must impact on women because women are the main carrier of cultural values from one generation to the other. In any situation where religious fundamentalism is on the rise it will always impact on women because at the heart of religious fundamentalist agendas is the control of women, of reproductive rights and of the family. The family becomes the space, particularly within a hostile environment, for culture and religion to thrive and continue. The family becomes a way of maintaining cultural and religious identity. It becomes the main means by which that identity is constructed and asserted.

Worldwide I think there are two trends that have been fuelled by the events of September 11. On the one hand the US has been given a new lease of life as a global superpower, striding the globe unchecked. It is doing its utmost to undermine all sorts of international organisations — the International Criminal Court, organisations monitoring climatic change, nuclear capability and biological warfare, the United Nations even — and through its economic power is bullying these organisations and undermining their existence in order to maintain its exploitation of the resources

of poorer countries. On the other hand we are seeing a rise and consolidation of religious fundamentalism, with these movements becoming spokespersons for the dispossessed, the disadvantaged, the deprived and the poor, and that's worrying because there's a vacuum of secular, democratic voices. That vacuum is being filled by religious fundamentalist movements. You can understand why people are driven to religious fundamentalism because nothing else seems capable of checking the US and the increased globalisation, which is basically US imperialism.

That takes us to the widening gap between rich and poor, the anger and frustration of the dispossessed and the way it becomes channelled towards movements that create other injustices, particularly impacting on women's freedom and struggles.

There are attempts to counteract these forces by women, peace activists, people in positions of power to provide a check on these developments. Women in western countries have become much more conscious of the impact of western culture globally on women's lives. There's an increasing awareness of the need to build alliances across culture and religion to safeguard women's rights.

At a local level, SBS and other groups like us have to take up the responsibility to maintain alliances and unity across religious divides in our work with women and not succumb to pressure or intimidation to revert to religious or cultural identities. At a wider level it is incumbent on feminists, black and white, to understand that women's oppression is not based on one system of power. One of the effects of globalisation on women's oppression is that racial, religious and patriarchal domination interact with each other. It's not possible to talk about violence against women and have zero tolerance policies without looking at the way asylum laws prevent women fleeing violent lives, without looking at violence as it affects women in different communities. More and more it's necessary to understand the interconnectedness of power relations across race, class, gender and religion and steer a course across that minefield and find solutions that don't benefit one section at the expense of another. □

Virtual campaigns and virtuous interventions

What do you do with all those urgent petitions you get in your email? How many copies did you get of the one about Afghan women? Dena Attar is studying women's use of the internet, and here she challenges us to think harder about the issues raised by one example of internet activism.

In the second half of 1998 a petition about the treatment of women in Afghanistan began to circulate on the Internet. Versions of what became known as the 'notorious Afghan petition', among other epithets, kept turning up in countless email inboxes for at least another three years. It had an amazing persistence, as Internet flotsam goes. The account pieced together here draws on the responses of more than twenty women in emails and interviews, and a further collection of about a hundred discussion threads in newsgroup archives. The story of this extraordinary document and its circulation does not just happen to be topical. I use it here to investigate the relationship between feminist process and the use of new communications technologies, as it seems to illustrate many of the hopes and anxieties bound up in attempts to use the Internet for direct activism.

Origins

The petition started out in Massachusetts in 1998 and seems to have been originally the work

of a couple of American students. The names of two women, one the representative of a feminist group at Connecticut College, the other an undergraduate at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, are included in the earliest versions I have seen. There is no reason to think they were anything other than what they seemed: young female students putting together a petition as a response to learning about some appalling events and having arguments with other people about the right attitude to take. There is a reference to the debate current in the summer and autumn of 1998, before the NATO bombing, about the rights and wrongs of intervening in Kosovo. In the earliest versions I collected it was clear that the petition was being sent round locally, was not the work of just one individual acting alone, and that an initial aim was for signatures to be returned to a women's group at the university:

This petition, when large enough, will be presented to the Women's Majority on Brandeis/and/or in the Boston Area, in

addition to perhaps Amnesty International, and to other organizations and the President, as a representation of people and Brandeis students, faculty, administration who want immediate attention to this issue. (version posted in 1998 still including both women's names as signatories)

The tentative wording here is worth noting. The earliest versions even included the point that the petition was 'Open to non-brandeis people of course!!', showing that the originators had little idea that it was likely to spread much beyond their immediate circles.

The return email address given in these early versions was sarabande@brandeis.edu (not, incidentally, the name of either of the two women who took responsibility for the original petition), hosted by Brandeis University. By the end of 1998 the volume of email was becoming unmanageable, and at the beginning of January 1999 the university disconnected it and began sending out this automatic response to anyone trying to access the 'sarabande' email address:

Please read this message carefully, especially the next two sentences. Do not reply to this email. Do not forward this email to anyone else. Anyone who needs a copy, already has one. Do not make things worse. Do not 'help' by forwarding this message to everyone who has corresponded with you on this subject.

Due to a flood of hundreds of thousands of messages in response to an unauthorized chain letter, all mail to sarabande@brandeis.edu is being deleted unread. It will never be a valid email address again. If you have a personal message for the previous owner of that address, you will need to find some means other than email to communicate.

sarabande@brandeis.edu was not an organization, but a person who was totally unprepared for the inevitable consequences of telling thousands of people to tell fifty of their friends to tell fifty of their friends to send her email.

It is our sincere hope that the hundreds of thousands of people who continue to attempt to reply will find a more productive outlet for their concerns. There are several excellent organizations and individuals doing real work on the issues raised. Some of them were mentioned in sarabande's letter. None of them authorized her actions. We suggest that you contact them through non-virtual channels to help. They all have web sites with information and contact points. Unlike sarabande, they can channel your energy in useful directions. Do not let this incident discourage you.



Please do not forward unverified chain letters, no matter how compelling they might seem. Propagating chain letters is specifically prohibited by the terms of service of most Internet service providers; you could lose your account.

Any replies to this message will be deleted unread. The issue is closed.

The issue was not closed, of course. The petition continued to circulate, and the university soon stopped sending any kind of reply.

The text

The petition is an odd kind of text — inconsistent, idiosyncratic, with an arresting first sentence but no heading or address. It combines narrative with polemic, shifts between the first, second and third person, quotes and paraphrases others without giving any clear references. There's some impassioned rhetoric, a gesture towards rational argument, and a series of compelling visual images — a woman's exposed arm leading to her death, women lying motionless and suffering, or crouched rocking and crying. The plight of educated, professional women in Afghanistan (women like the author and presumed reader) gets special emphasis. In fact the text breaks just about all the rules set out in Phil Agre's article on 'Designing Effective Action Alerts for the Internet'. It's structured as a chain letter; has no date; gives inadequate information about its source and its purpose; as a document, does not possess a clear structure; includes obscure personal references, e.g. 'David Cornwell has told me...'; does not contain a summary; uses (in

A 1999 version of the petition

From: [name removed]

Sent: 14 June 1999 14:37

To: Multiple recipients

Re: (Fwd) Taliban and women

PETITION ON THE TALIBAN WAR ON WOMEN

Please sign to support, and include your town and country. Then copy and e-mail to as many people as possible. If you receive this list with more than 50 names on it, please e-mail a copy of it to Mary Robinson, High Commission, UNHCHR, webadmin.hchr@unorg.ch and to Angela King, Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, UN. Even if you decide not to sign, please forward it to others so the names of those who are on the list will still be passed on. Please be considerate and do not kill the petition. Thank you. It is best to copy rather than forward the petition.

The Taliban's War on Women

The government of Afghanistan is waging a war upon women. The situation is getting so bad that one person in an editorial of the Times compared the treatment of women there to the treatment of Jews in pre-Holocaust Poland.

Since the Taliban took power in 1996, women have had to wear burqa and have been beaten and stoned in public for not having the proper attire, even if this means simply not having the mesh covering in front of their eyes.

many versions) highly emotive language and polemic — *'Even if you decide not to sign, please be considerate and do not kill the petition.'*

It's tempting to speculate about the effect of all this on its circulation — did readers really not notice its quirks, or did they feel more inclined to treat it sympathetically because it seemed so heartfelt and direct, even if naive? The only conclusion for which I have any real evidence is that many people simply did not read it closely.

Patterns of circulation

The text in circulation, meanwhile, was being changed as it went round, hardly surprisingly as it is so easy to change email texts before forwarding them. It is more surprising that there were so few changes, so that three years later it was still possible to receive an emailed petition with substantially the same wording, including the quirks and personal references, and even the original, long since defunct, return email address.

Changes to some versions early on, though, were critical in detaching the petition from its original context, removing much sense of where and when it had started. The introductory section, indicating where the petition was eventually supposed to go, tended to be omitted, along with the name of the woman acknowledged as having compiled the information in the petition. A second name remained but was not easy to notice, since it was not in any obvious position as a 'signature', and long texts are difficult to read closely on screen. Many people seemed to assume that the petition was anonymous or else the sole work of 'sarabande', as the official Brandeis statement — which does not have to be taken at face value — claimed.

The few really significant, deliberate changes that were made and perpetuated from 1999 onwards by persons unknown were the addition or substitution of the UN and/or Mary Robinson, the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, as the intended recipients, sometimes with email addresses. These alterations, along with extra stuck-on arm-twisting phrases like 'Please spare three minutes of your life' probably contributed to the petition's staying power, although the original version was still in circulation as well, at least up until late 2001. After September 11 2001, there were reports that the petition was being circulated more frequently, presumably for somewhat different reasons.

In the wake of the original petition, a large assortment of related texts including various

other associated petitions, bits of text copied and pasted from webpages, messages posted to discussion groups as well as ordinary emails were forwarded or copied. One, supposedly about women in Zimbabwe but using chunks of text copied straight from the Afghanistan petition, has been referred to as a deliberate hoax because it is such an obvious copy. Women in Zimbabwe are certainly having their human rights abused, and it is still possible that this version was a genuine, well-intentioned effort. As for other forwarded messages, the Brandeis statement was



itself copied on to several websites which specialised in nailing Internet 'hoaxes', and so in due course the anti-forwarding warning itself began to be circulated, along with references to hoax-busting websites.

In 1999 I analysed lists of names attached to a sample of six copies of the petition emailed to me, and found women appearing to outnumber men by about two to one, out of a total of around three hundred names. The signatures originated in 28 different countries, predominantly Western European, North American and Australasian. (The two to one ratio related only to names whose gender I was fairly certain of, although of course, identities on the Internet can't be established for certain without backup from other evidence). This brief survey confirmed my suspicion that the petition was being circulated

One woman was beaten to DEATH by an angry mob of fundamentalists for accidentally exposing her arm while she was driving. Another was stoned to death for trying to leave the country with a man that was not a relative. Women are not allowed to work or even to go out in public without a male relative. Professional women such as professors, translators, doctors, lawyers, artists and writers have been forced from their jobs and stuffed into their homes so that depression is becoming so widespread that it has reached emergency levels. There is no way in such an extreme Islamic society to know the suicide rate with certainty, but relief workers are estimating that the suicide rate among women, who cannot find proper medication and treatment for severe depression and would rather take their lives than live in such conditions, has increased significantly. Homes where a woman is present must have their windows painted so that she can never be seen by outsiders. They must wear silent shoes so that they are never heard. Women live in fear of their lives for the slightest misbehavior. Because they cannot work, those without male relatives or husbands are either starving to death or begging on the street, even if they hold Ph.D.'s. There are almost no medical facilities available for women, and relief workers, in protest, have mostly left the country, taking medicine and psychologists and other things necessary to treat the skyrocketing level of depression among women. At one of the rare hospitals for women, a reporter found still, nearly lifeless bodies lying motionless on top of beds, wrapped in their burqa, unwilling to speak, eat or do anything, but slowly wasting away. Others have gone mad and were seen

crouched in corners, perpetually rocking or crying, most of them in fear.

One doctor is considering, when what little medication that is left finally runs out, leaving these women in front of the president's residence as a form of peaceful protest. It is at the point where the term "human rights violations" has become an understatement. Husbands have the power of life and death over their women relatives, especially their wives, but an angry mob has just as much right to stone or beat a woman, often to death, for exposing an inch of flesh or offending them in the slightest way. David Cornwell has said that those in the West should not judge the Afghan people for such treatment because it is a "cultural thing," but this is not even true. Women enjoyed relative freedom, to work, dress generally as they wanted, and drive and appear in public alone until only 1996 – the rapidity of this transition is the main reason for the depression and suicide. Women who were once educators or doctors or simply used to basic human freedoms are now severely restricted and treated as subhuman in the name of right wing fundamentalist Islam. It is not their tradition or "culture," but is alien to them, and it is extreme even for those cultures where fundamentalism is the rule. Besides, if we could excuse everything on cultural grounds, then we should not be appalled that the Carthaginians sacrificed their infant children, that little girls are circumcised in parts of Africa, that blacks in the deep south in the 1930s were lynched, prohibited from voting, and forced to submit to unjust Jim Crow laws. Everyone has a right to tolerable human existence, even if they are women in a

primarily by and amongst women, although there is no doubt that a large number of men also forwarded it. It has also been posted to many non-English-language newsgroups.

The responses discussed below are mainly those I found in the Usenet archive, which dates back to 1995, and is now owned by Google. (Usenet is the part of the Internet that supports newsgroups, which allow people to put a message on a 'virtual bulletin board' and have others read it and write back. There are thousands of different newsgroups.) The petition had been posted to hundreds of discussion groups, dedicated to a huge range of topics mostly quite unrelated to Afghanistan, human rights or feminist activism. All that can be known of these various contributors is that they were communicating to others whose nominal shared interest was the group's official topic, which could be anything: heavy metal, endometriosis, Buddhism, Star Trek, witchcraft, aliens, Irish politics, computer systems, Pink Floyd, and atheism all figured in the list of names of groups discussing the petition, alongside more obviously relevant ones such as Islam, Pakistan, women and society.

Responses and debates

The most striking feature of women's initial responses to the petition was the amount of anxiety expressed. In many cases it was not simply a question of deciding whether to forward or delete it. Women either found 'intermediate' responses revealing uncertainty or ambivalence, or forwarded it but sent follow-up messages saying they hadn't felt sure about the course of action they chose. 'Intermediate' actions included not actually forwarding the petition but still saving it in the inbox rather than deleting it, or explaining that they were forwarding it without adding their own signatures.

The 'official' Internet response, in messages and on websites setting out to provide authoritative advice to Internet users on etiquette, hoaxes, proper and improper ways of doing net activism and so on, did not allow for such ambivalence. It was mostly unequivocal: Don't forward the petition because it isn't going anywhere, and anyway all such email petitions are worthless. Even so, in many cases these warnings included the point that the information in the petition about the treatment of women in Afghanistan was accurate, so the petition was not exactly a hoax — just misguided.

The follow-up response going beyond simple one-off reactions, when there was any, amounted to two separate and only occasionally intersecting debates, over the rights and wrongs of the petition. The one that engaged most attention was on the value of email petitions in general, and this one in particular. Most such exchanges simply consisted of anti-forwarders reprimanding forwarders, which gives the lie to any notion that the Internet is an unregulated place. It can be visualised more accurately as a public forum where users get to regulate, or tick off, those they perceive as having less experience, sense or awareness of proper online behaviour. These secondary responses were further differentiated by tone, which might be helpful —

I wrote off to everybody I'd forwarded it to so they wouldn't have to sting under that spanking from Brandeis. It did sting, too.

patronising —

I am trying to educate women about this. scornful or annoyed. There were degrees of exasperation —

not AGAIN!!

and while some objectors simply described the petition as pointless or a hoax, others made a distinction between the problem of the format and the truthfulness of the content.

In turn, while some forwarders were grateful for being put right, others did not meekly accept being rebuked, and resisted the 'official' line that the petition was pointless. Some women argued that even if signing it was pointless, it had a consciousness-raising purpose. This was also pretty much the view of 'Selay', the pseudonym of a RAWA spokeswoman quoted by Joy Pincus in a WomensENews article of August 2001:

Its circulation on the Internet was itself a good experience. Many people came to know about the women's rights disaster in Afghanistan after receiving that petition.

'Helpful' information passed on out of context sometimes led to misunderstandings, like the angry response of one woman sent a general exhortation copied direct from the 'Snopes' anti-hoax website on using more serious methods for activism, which she took to be a personally directed diatribe:

enough of the sermons, you have no idea what I do in my personal life.

The petition's actual content was picked up for discussion much less often. When this did happen, the most frequent topics discussed (well before September 2001) were the morality of any forceful intervention, followed by the morality of

Muslim country in a part of the world that Westerners do not understand. If we can threaten military force in Kosovo in the name of human rights for the sake of ethnic Albanians, than NATO and the West can certainly express peaceful outrage at the oppression, murder and injustice committed against women by the Taliban.

STATEMENT: In signing this, we agree that the current treatment of women in Afghanistan is completely UNACCEPTABLE and deserves support and Action by the people of the United Nations and that the current situation in Afghanistan will not be tolerated. Women's Rights is not a small issue anywhere and it is UNACCEPTABLE for women in 1999 to be treated as subhuman and as so much property.

Equality and human decency is a RIGHT, not a freedom, whether one lives in Afghanistan or anywhere else.

[followed by list of 42 names, removed]

Please sign to support, and include your town and country. Then copy and e-mail to as many people as possible. If you receive this list with more than 50 names on it, please e-mail a copy of it to Mary Robinson, High Commissioner, UNHCHR, webadmin.hchr@un.org.ch and to Angela King, Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the advancement of Women, UN.

[ends with name and address of forwarder, removed]

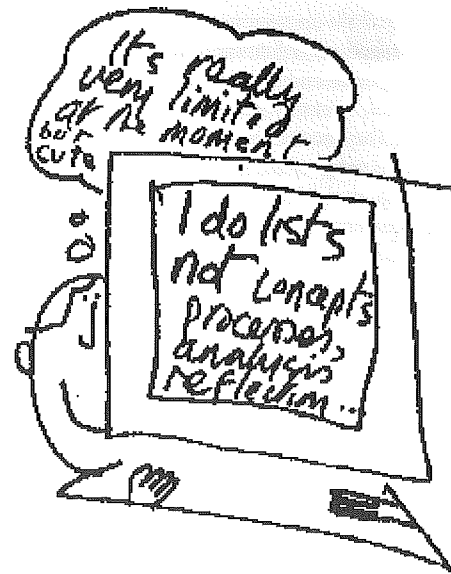
cultural relativism. While these were usually very sketchy debates, some were fairly well informed and referred to the historical background of Soviet and US intervention in Afghanistan, or other sources of information such as magazine articles and TV shows, notably an Oprah Winfrey show featuring RAWA. More rarely, and especially when at least one participant was Moslem, people raised the question of how Islamic the Taliban interpretation of Islam actually was.

These otherwise separate debates collided occasionally when people objected to being told the petition was a hoax, or to the trivial matter of Internet etiquette taking precedence over its content, as in this sarcastic post:

Who can be bothered with this nonsense? We have more important issues right here in the Good ol' USA. WE MUST STOP SPAM! After we've accomplished this most important goal, we'll get to those Afghan women and other world trouble spots.

The case advanced against circulation, other than that the petition was 'spam' (spam — a term borrowed from the Monty Python sketch — refers to mass-delivered, unrequested email, usually advertising), or a hoax and not going anywhere, amounted to assertions that no one could take such armchair activism — or 'slactivism' — seriously, that it allowed people a misguided feelgood moment in the spurious belief that they were doing more than they were, and that perpetuating bad examples of Internet activism undermined confidence and made people wary of using the Internet for campaigns at all.

The case for circulation, in contrast, asserting that it raised awareness and may have led to numbers of people campaigning in other more active ways, is possibly sustained by the publicity RAWA gained and by the success of the US Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF)'s Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan. The Foundation used petition drives (emphatically not email petitions) and claimed to have generated over 200,000 petitions and tens of thousands of faxes and e-mails to the Department of State — amounting to more mail than Department officials received on any other foreign policy issue. It's an open question how much this was influenced by the currency of the earlier email petition, and it also leaves open the question of what was achieved that might not otherwise have happened. In the US, the Socialist Workers Party tried to answer the question by attacking FMF 'liberal feminists' for their



naivety in pursuing women's rights issues, and so lending support to US intervention under cover of the pretence that the administration actually cared about Afghan women.

There is no convincing case either that the petition made any difference to actual events, or that it was a complete waste of time. There is rather more evidence that it allowed for an informal and often uncomfortable educational campaign primarily amongst women, less on the issue of Afghanistan than on uses of the Internet. Looking back, there were other problematic features that were never raised, and that apply not just to this example but to many other instances of attempts to raise consciousness or conduct Internet campaigns.

Copy and paste debates, and the forwarding of stuff

The petition presented a narrow set of facts that became ever more fossilised, although this is not to suggest that they were false. The original text was written passionately and personally, based on a small selection of stories and concentrating on a few harrowing anecdotes and unforgettable images. Possibly these idiosyncracies made a difference to the response, and to whether women felt able to ignore or delete it, even against their better judgements. As a source of information leading to any kind of debate or understanding, though, it was extremely limited — which does not mean exaggerated — even allowing for the way it was stuck in time and never updated. This is not the fault of its

originators, who were hardly envisaging an unchanging, four year campaign, but it does mean that just that small selection of facts reached millions, while other facts such as the thousands of Afghan women dying in pregnancy or childbirth each year, the internal politics of Afghanistan including Al-Qaida's involvement, or its external relations with Pakistan and the USA, were less publicised. As a few of the more honest and self-reflexive commentators noted last year, it turned out that most people were less well-informed than they had believed.

Forwarding stuff is what people, in vast numbers, learn to do on the Internet, because it is so easy and because they see it already going on. It's a way to participate, share in an existing culture, and amuse, but it is often meant to be about informing and educating as well as supporting campaigns, especially on email lists. After September 11, even more people appeared to pick it up as a practice, forwarding anti-war petitions and copied and pasted articles. The amount of email being sent around, both personally and to discussion lists, increased dramatically in autumn 2001 according to measurements of Internet traffic.

The stuff I saw both as personal email and on several different lists tended to carry the same disadvantages as the petition. It was often circulated without any idea of its original context, making it harder to evaluate. With print media texts you can see at once if you're reading an editorial and what flavour newspaper it's from, or if you've just been handed a leaflet by a demonstrator from an identifiable group. You can also usually tell when a text was produced. These copy and paste debates, though, provided little sense of context (who wrote this, when and why?) and very little actual debate. The same small groups and handful of writers repeatedly got privileged attention, their texts forwarded on with perhaps a few respectful words of introduction but rarely any real comment, criticism or other engagement, even when clearly differing arguments were being advanced and rationally we couldn't support them all. Maybe everyone circulating RAWA statements or Chomsky's words agreed with everything they wrote, but it was impossible to tell when they were forwarded to discussion lists without comment. This may have been interesting or even occasionally useful, but it was not discussion or debate.

In this age of information, there is any amount of information going around, but without



space to think about it and ways to organise, all that a vast amount of information about appalling events can do is to make us into spectators. The Internet, because it is not a passive medium, seems to offer a way out from being stuck in the helpless spectator role. Messages that are interactive, fast, in your face, addressing you directly, urging you on to do something even if it's only to spend more time clicking your mouse, can come at you every day. The feminist originators of the 'Not in our name' petition had obviously learned some lessons from the past, since they did not aim to collect signatures but urged recipients to do something, anything. But then what?

Whatever our individual experience, we are all still relative beginners at the new networking. I am not dismissing all attempts at Internet activism as useless or misguided, but it's clear that the speed and ease the Internet affords can delude us into believing that politics, campaigns, understanding complex realities, even thinking, can be speeded up and made easy. But there are no 'three minutes of your life' solutions.

Even the apparently simpler task of using email for group contact can turn out problematic, as Women Against Fundamentalisms (WAF) found when in autumn 2001 it began trying to use what was formerly a discussion-only list for organisational purposes. Email list membership, and active group membership, turned out not necessarily to be exact matches or to mean the same for everyone. WAF's online presence gave rise to wider expectations, not based on direct experience, about the group's existence and activities. Assumptions about who had access to which emails, and when, turned out not to hold

up. Meetings ended up cancelled or rearranged at short notice. When WAF did meet, women present spoke strongly in favour of face-to-face meetings rather than relying only on virtual discussions and organisation. Email had kept the group alive throughout a dormant period, but was no satisfactory substitute for a working sense of who we were and what we aimed to do.

And yet the Internet ought to be a great tool for getting hold of information and organising, once we get more proficient and experienced — assuming we know what we think and what we want to do. The evidence of the petition seems to show that it works far less well as a space to think and discuss: people do not generally read long texts closely online, and are hesitant about saying what they think to a potentially unknown audience in a public forum. It's easier not to commit yourself, just to scan, forward, delete.

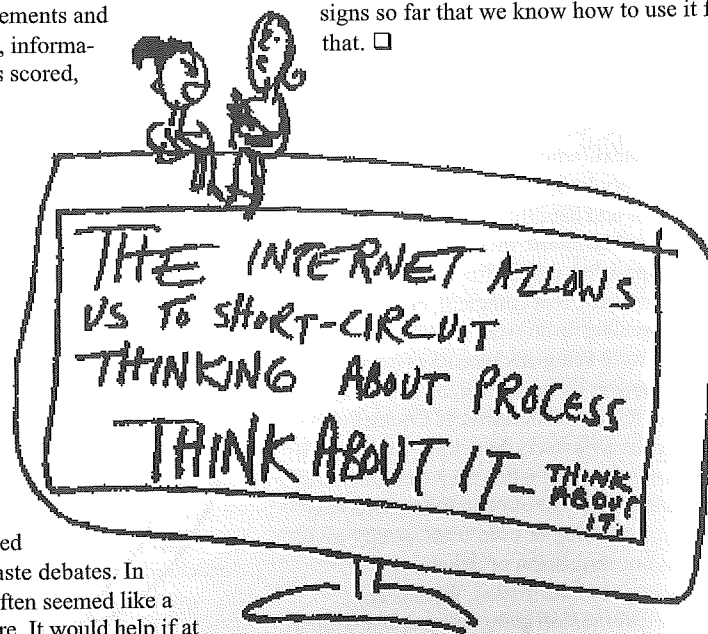
Improving behaviour and practice is the easy part: it means accepting that we are all in the process of learning ourselves and helping to educate others, and taking up those responsibilities without dishing out crudely worded or gratuitous criticism. This doesn't imply agreement that 'authorities' can dictate acceptable or unacceptable Internet use in all circumstances, or that a university's stern words to its own junior members must translate into universal guidelines. Good practice could still include consciousness-raising. The more important and difficult questions are: so what? Why? Whether groups meet or don't, statements and petitions are signed or not, information gets circulated, points scored, money sent and so on, means nothing at all unless people start out with a realistic sense of what they want to achieve.

The petition confused and annoyed many people because, while they agreed with its sentiments, it appeared to lack realistic goals. The same lack of clarity, of realistic goals, seems attached to a high percentage of the forwarded stuff and the copy-and-paste debates. In discussion lists, debates often seemed like a closed loop, going nowhere. It would help if at

least we made explicit distinctions between sending on information, or statements of support, or appeals for action, or contributions to debate, and were clearer about what formats and structures each needed and how they were meant to work. The question hovering over the petition — what exactly was it trying to achieve? — hovers over a lot of the activities and exchanges of recent months. When were people aiming to inform or educate themselves or others, when were they aiming to organise, when were they dealing just with their own feelings, or simply allying themselves with someone else's words and leaving it at that?

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s there were intense feminist arguments about structure and structurelessness, how to communicate, how to organise, how to listen to or not silence each other, how to arrive at statements of principle or policy and decisions on how to act. The Internet allows us to short-circuit thinking about process.

We are in danger of forgetting what we used to know, since it doesn't translate automatically to computer-mediated communication. The vagueness and political emptiness of the self-serving slogan 'Not In Our Name' on petitions and placards last year should wake us up to how easy it is now to proliferate texts with no clear aim in mind, regardless of whether they have anything useful — to anyone else — to say. The Internet might turn out to be a good tool to help clear our minds and aims, but there are few signs so far that we know how to use it for that. □



Note

¹ Phil Agre, 'Designing Effective Action Alerts for the Internet' (1994-98) <http://dliis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/alerts.html>

Reference

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www.cs.ubc.ca/spider/cronauer/activism_and_the_internet

A statement from Korean women's groups

This statement was issued on February 7, 2002 in Seoul, Korea by an alliance of women's groups.

We absolutely cannot accept words threatening war on the Korean peninsula.

Last year when President Bush declared war on Afghanistan, he demanded that every nation stand on his side. President Bush has now announced the second stage of the war on terrorism. He has called North Korea, Iran and Iraq an axis of evil with an implied threat of war on the Korean peninsula.

Bush's pronouncement is a threat to Koreans who have worked so hard for peace and peaceful reunification on the Korean peninsula. It has come at a time when many non-governmental exchanges have been revived between the South and the North. Coming just before the South Korea-US summit in February, Bush's words mean that South Korea-North Korea and North Korea-U.S relations are not going to be easy.

Dividing the world into good and evil and increasing the likelihood of military arms deployment throw the world into a semi-war state. For the sake of peace and security on the Korean peninsula and for a peaceful world, we make the following statement:

First, we strongly protest Bush's promotion of an atmosphere of war and creation of a pervasive sense of terror while seeking to gain hegemony. We demand that Bush renounce his bellicose words.

Second, we reject any kind of military action that increases tension and conflict on the Korean peninsula. Growing tension and military action will surely ruin the whole economy on the Korean peninsula. There have been talks between North Korea and the US about restraining the spread of weapons of mass destruction. We women urge the U.S to solve problems by continuing to talk and negotiate with North Korea, not through military action.

Third, we insist that the U.S stop forcing arms purchases and cease using alleged threats from North Korea as an excuse to justify Missile Defence program. North Korea has declared its moratorium on missile tests until 2003. In the wake of 9/11, North Korea condemned the terrorist attacks and signed several key UN antiterrorism pacts. We women sincerely urge that advanced science, technology, and huge material resources rather than being used to hasten hostile military confrontations be employed to improve the welfare, human rights, and environmental conditions of the weak.

Fourth, we request that the Kim Dae Jung administration protest and clearly draw back from hostile US policy targeting North Korea. South Korea, which has maintained a military alliance with the US, requires skillful political leadership in carrying out a peaceful reunification

process with North Korea. We women insist that the South Korean government be the driving force behind a reconciliation and co-operation policy and that it carry out the policy with positive action and wisdom.

Fifth, the press must realize that this crisis is directly connected with the fate of our people. We plead that this matter be carefully dealt with in order to serve the national interest and to promote peace on the Korean peninsula.

Women Making Peace

Women's Peace Action against War

Korea Women's Associations United

Kyungki Korea Women's Associations United

Kwangju and Chonnam Korea Women's Associations United

Taegu and Kyungbuk Korea Women's Associations United

Pusan Korea Women's Associations United

Chonbuk Korea Women's Associations United

Kyungnam Women United

Christian Women Minjung Association

Taegu Women's Association

Taejon Women's Association

Pusan Sexual Violence Counseling Center

Pusan Women's Social Institute

Korean Catholic Women Association

Aaeoomtuh

Suwon Women's Association

Korean Women's Center For Social Research

Ulsan Women's Association

Korean Women Farmers Association

Lastly, we fervently hope that students, politicians, religious leaders, women's organizations, and peace organizations in the US will take steps to halt the spread of war rhetoric and the threat of military action. We promise to continue our efforts to uphold and keep peace. We also declare that sustaining peace on the Korean Peninsula is essential to maintaining and advancing the peace of the world.

Cheju Women's Association

Chonbuk Women's Association

Pohang Women's Association

Korea Daycare Center Teacher's Association

Korea Sexual Violence Relief Center

Korea Women Worker Association

Women Link

Korean Women's Studies Institute

Korean Women Theologian Association

Korean Women's Hot Line

Korean Differently Abled Women's United

Taegu Housewives Association For Environment

Korean Catholic Women's Community for a New World

My Sister's Place

Peace Mother

The Korean Council For the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan

Korean Church Women

United Committee of Women

Korean Federation for Environment Movement

Contact Point: Gyung-Lan Jung
(jglan21@yahoo.com) □

'We have to change our lives'

September 11 looks set to be constructed as the defining moment in modern history. In its aftermath comes intensified oppression for the Palestinians, whose defining historical moment was al-Naqba — the catastrophe — of 1948, the devastating consequences of which they have endured ever since. Frankie Green of Palestine Solidarity Campaign invited Palestinian women from a variety of situations to consider what difference, if any, 11 September made to them. These pieces were written in January to March 2002, before the renewed Israeli incursions into the Occupied Territories.

Wafaa Shaheen and Trees Zbidat-Kosterman are feminists living within Israel, active in Palestinian women's organisations. They describe their experience of double discrimination as women in a patriarchal society and within a minority community inside the apartheid system of Israel, and the search for ways to develop a society where women's freedom is possible.

To write about Palestinian Arab women inside Israel, we must provide some history.

In 1948, during the establishment of the new Jewish state, some 450 out of 570 Arab villages were destroyed. Seventy-five per cent of the population fled, some from fear, some with the false promise of return, some were forcibly expelled. About 750,000 people became refugees in neighbouring countries. Only 150,000 were

able to stay within the new borders of Israel, and of those who did remain some 40,000 found themselves refugees in their own homeland. Their economic and political institutions had collapsed and their cultural traditions were threatened. Everything was taken from the 'internal' refugees, who fled to neighbouring villages. For example, the Mayary family now in Sakhnin, originally from Mayar, 5 kilometres away — now a Jewish settlement called Yad — are still here, but are called 'absentees'!

As a result of massive land expropriation, Palestinians faced impoverishment and paralysis. They became a minority, subject to severe military rule until 1967, unable to travel or work without permits, a comparable situation to that now prevailing in the West Bank and Gaza.

Every sign of resistance was oppressed brutally; members of the 1960s movement 'Al Art' (Our Land) faced long imprisonment, as did people involved in other Arab political initiatives. During protests over land confiscations in 1976 the Israelis killed six people, (including Trees' niece); *Yom Al Art* (Day of the Land) is now commemorated annually. Activists here were punished even harder than the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Trees' husband was six years in prison, and every family has members who have been incarcerated.

Having lost control over his land and status, the Palestinian man remained in control of only one domain: his family, his wife and children. In particular, the concept of honour acquired new importance and meaning in the light of men's fears and sense of powerlessness. The Arabic for land is *Art*, for honour, *Ard*. The possession of land gives respect and social status to the Palestinian man — it is not only a matter of money, to be a landowner means you are somebody.

Before 1948, Palestinian people were farmers, whether with a lot of land or little, everybody had some, for agriculture and to build houses for the next generation. Land is fundamental to Palestinian culture, economy and identity in many ways. The current destruction of olive groves by Israeli military and settlers is not simply the destruction of thousands of trees, but of the Palestinian soul. Land gave Palestinians food, and spices to put on our bread. Every spring women went out to the fields for *zataar* (thyme), the whole family picking the leaves to mix with roasted sesame seeds. Now the Israeli government has made picking *zataar* illegal; people are still doing it, but are fined heavily if caught by the police.

This is to let you understand how important *Art* is. It is everything in life. The second thing which is crucial for a Palestinian man is the matter of *Ard*, the honour of the female family members. Well-behaved wives and daughters bring respect and social standing, therefore men are supposed to protect them, they are precious.

With 1948 and the theft and control of Palestinian land, it was no longer a source of income. A whole society was destroyed. Unable to work as farmers any more, people became mainly unskilled labourers, the lowest paid people with the lowest status in Israel.

What remained was the respect men could gain from women's behaviour, which became

even more important. Men used more violence in order to protect this source of respect: for example if his daughter was seen to speak openly with a strange man in the street, or dressed 'improperly', this humiliated her father, it signaled his lack of authority. Girls have been killed for it. Arab villages are surrounded by settlements, and in the cities you see a European way of life. This is considered a big danger for the girls. Young men marrying foreign or Jewish women don't face so many problems, the bride is either expected to become Muslim or is considered part of her new family. But for an Arab girl to marry somebody from another community is the biggest crime she can commit: she will become a member of this other (Jewish or Christian) community, and the Palestinian community will lose her, and may consider it as betrayal.

It is hard for an Arab girl in Israel to go out of the village to study or to work; the family may fear that she will meet somebody who is not 'one of us', or may adopt a more 'modern' lifestyle and 'lose respect' for her brothers and father — by which they mean that they cannot control her any more. All this has put increased pressure on the lives of women and girls.

From 1948 until the late 1980s no women's organizations were established. Palestinian Arab women inside Israel have been neglected since the establishment of the state. They account for more than half a million of Israel's citizens. They are the most disadvantaged sector of the population, facing double discrimination as Arabs within the Jewish state, and within male-dominated Palestinian society. They are the poorest, worst paid, least educated portion of the community, inadequately protected by courts. Their situation is made worse by lack of access to decision-making and positions of power. As a consequence, their perspectives and needs are continually neglected.

The first question to ask in the context of this article is: did the events of September 11 have an impact? Of course everybody was shocked, and for days we were sitting in front of the television. During these days, people here were very sad that most of the television channels showed pictures of 'dancing and celebrating Palestinians'. [Editor's note: there was little media coverage of candle-lit vigils held by Palestinians in sympathy with victims of September 11. Frequently shown, however, was footage of a woman apparently rejoicing.

Subsequently, journalists from *Stern* magazine traced this woman and revealed that not only had she been filmed after being bribed, she was in fact unaware of what had actually taken place.] Again we felt that the world is against us. People here know very well the difference between the human suffering of victims of September 11 and the political side of it. Some people even hoped that Americans could feel now what suffering means. But as you can see, nowadays, the Palestinians are again considered 'terrorists'.

What has had a much bigger impact on the lives and opinions of women here is the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The Arab community knew that they were discriminated against by the Israeli government. But there was hope that Israel could come to see them as equal citizens (95 % of the Arabs inside voted for Barak). There were a lot of co-existence initiatives. We work for Al-Zahraa, a women's organisation in Sakhnin, a Palestinian Arab town in Galilee which is 90 per cent Muslim and 10 per cent Christian, and our centre held joint meetings with Jewish women living in the settlements in the Galilee, and organised trips for Jewish and Arab children. People here thought this was the way towards equality.

On 1 October 2000 spontaneous demonstrations broke out in the Arab villages in the Triangle and in Galilee (as in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza), partly in solidarity with their people in the Occupied Territories, but also out of frustration because of continuing land confiscations, house demolitions, unemployment and lack of infrastructure. (For example, Israeli communities have always had electricity, Sakhnin only since 1978. Everything has been confiscated. Trees is fighting a demolition order on her house — on her own land — the regional council of Jewish settlements in Galilee having decided that they want it. The border of Sakhnin and Misgav has been drawn through her kitchen!)

On October 2, 2000, ten children were killed by the Israeli police forces and five days later, another three. People took a lesson from this: if Israel doesn't recognize us as citizens, then we will not be good citizens. In the past there have been many demonstrations by Jewish citizens and no-one has been killed. One policeman said during an interview that when there are Arab demonstrators, they take their guns with them, when there are Jewish demonstrators, only batons. Nowadays, rather than feeling themselves to be Israeli Arabs, people are more likely



The first conference for Palestinian women inside Israel

to identify as Palestinian Arabs, especially the youth.

What has this to do with women? We felt immediately that there was danger for women's struggle for equality. At once the national cause became more important than the women's. Many men (and some women) said there must first be equality between the two peoples before women can demand what they want. But women are the ones who are losing their children, and suffering so much. Women have to continue taking care of their other children. They are the centre of the family and they see their children traumatized by violence. Women now demand equality and more freedom, they also want to have a voice in negotiations. They see that there have been peace talks for years and years, yet men never asked their opinions.

It is clear from the women who are visiting our Centre that they want to think about politics, that they want to decide too about their own lives. Nowadays Palestinian Arab women in Israel want to educate themselves, they want to know more. Last year we held a workshop with Arab Knesset members and women from all over Galilee. One of the Arab MKs said that women are very important in the struggle, because the Arabs are a minority and they must become a majority, meaning that women must give birth to as many children as possible. Some women became very angry (and it was beautiful to see); they said, 'We are fed up with becoming an uneducated majority, we want to become an educated minority. And our daughters have the

Course on empowerment for girls



right to study as our sons have.'

One of our first initiatives was to build up a network of all Arab (Bedouin and Druze) women's groups in the country. In March 2000 we organized the first International Women's Day for Arab women, where the language was Arabic, not Hebrew, which was attended by 1,700 women from all over the country. We conduct lectures throughout the country and organize 'empowerment' courses for women and teenage girls. Economic empowerment is a very hot item. Until now women are financially dependent on male family members. There is high unemployment and men are the first to have the jobs.

Al-Zahraa also participates in annual November demonstrations against sexual and domestic violence, organised by Women Against Violence, Nazareth. In March 2001 we held the first conference for Palestinian women inside Israel, addressing issues such as women and labour, politics and health. We published papers from last year's conference as a book in Arabic, the first study of the situation of Palestinian Arab women inside Israel. Our strategy is to have an annual conference: in 2002 the focus will be Palestinian women and decision-making positions, examining the role of women inside Arab NGOs. We have to start in our own community, and work on changing strategies here. In the Arab NGOs the board members and directors are mostly men. This has to change.

The one million Palestinian Arabs living inside Israel don't exist for the outside world. It

is hard to build up relations with other Arab groups and organizations. We tried to do so with the UNIFEM office in Amman, believing that if financial support is given to women from the Occupied Territories, Palestinian women inside Israel should not be excluded. But according to UNIFEM, because we are

living inside the Israeli border, we are not considered as part of the Palestinian people. From the Israeli government, we cannot expect any financial support, because they don't give any to Arab NGOs. As we wrote to UNIFEM, the so-called 'green line' (the armistice line demarcating Israel from the West Bank pre-1967) doesn't make us less Arab, we face the same problems as other Arab women: family honour killings, marriages at a young age, poor education, domestic violence, etc, but at least the incredible hardships that women in other societies face is recognised and steps are taken to alleviate their misery. Here — where Arab women constitute more than 10 per cent of the population — no such steps are taken. There is no provision enabling them to participate in the political process, or to ensure fair treatment when their rights have been infringed; there are hardly any national NGOs dealing specifically with Arab women's issues. Those that do exist find it very difficult to acquire funding.

A 1997 study by the Arab Association for Human Rights showed that 80 per cent of Arab women of working age did not work. In Nazareth (where the largest number of Arab women are in employment) 61 per cent of women receive less than the legal minimum wage, 72 per cent work without any legal contract and only 35 per cent receive payment for any kind of overtime work they do.

Israel ratified the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) in 1991. It has yet to adopt any

substantive measures to improve the lot of Arab women. The CEDAW provisions have not even been incorporated into Israeli domestic law, and thus are not binding on the courts. Furthermore, when Israel submitted its initial report to the CEDAW committee in 1996 it mentioned Arab women only once. A counter report was prepared by the Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women in Israel (a national network of Palestinian NGO representatives and activists) to highlight the laxity of the Israeli government with regard to improving the status of Arab women in the population. It was found that the government's report refers to them as 'Arab', 'Bedouin' and 'Druze' not 'Palestinians' — reflecting Israel's policy of not recognising Palestinians living in Israel as a national minority.

The reason why Palestinian women's organisations here are stressing the need for such recognition is because we believe that it is the first step in solving a complex problem. For a lot of Palestinian women in Israel their sense of identity is all they have — it is what they cling to, the only form of self-preservation. One may argue that identity is a personal issue outside the purview of state matters. But that is not the case in Israel — a state which was built on identity and uses all the machinery at its disposal to subvert the identity of its Palestinian population. And these women are in a *conflict* situation. This is all-encompassing — it is a factor which governs their everyday actions and responses. There is a risk that the political flux that is occurring is bound to drown out any women's movement initiative since it is almost certain that 'wider national interests' will take precedence.

The present intifada has resulted in a great deal of soul-searching amongst Palestinian youth and women in Israel and has raised questions about their role and position in Israeli society. All sections of Palestinian society here are beginning to recognise that the inequality they have been enduring for years must stop. The level of disillusionment and anger is at an all time high. And when one hears Israeli spokespersons accusing mothers of sending their children out into the streets to become martyrs, one cannot realistically think that the boiling rage that inspired the uprising is likely to subside. And imagine the situation once there is a Palestinian state. It may mean even more misery for us: Israeli talk of our 'transfer' is a daily issue here.

Fifty-four years down the line Arab women in Israel still face enormous barriers to their

emancipation. All of them know, religious and non-religious women alike, that they have to change our lives. If not for themselves, then for the benefit of their daughters. And they are willing to change, but the society — both Arab and Israeli — is working against them.



Two-thirds of the Palestinian population live in exile — as refugees in the Occupied Territories or surrounding countries to which their terrorised families fled from historical Palestine, and elsewhere in the world-wide diaspora — denied their lawful right of return to their homes. Sama Danyal, currently in her homeland for the first time and working in community development projects for women's education and training, describes her experience as a Palestinian refugee with American citizenship.

September must be the unluckiest month of the year. Not only does it remind me of the brutal massacres of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, but now also the tragic loss of life in the US last year. As a Palestinian-American woman, I find myself lost in a complex world of harsh judgments and evil reprisals.

My parents suffered at the hands of the Zionist entity that removed them from their beloved homeland into a poverty-stricken refugee camp in a country where they were not welcomed. However, they found the means and strength to not only educate themselves, but also to move to the 'Land of the Free' for a peaceful future for our family. Two years after I was born we made our move to America, leaving the



Two women attending the course on women and empowerment

Lecture for Bedouin women from the Negev, visiting al Zahraa



vicious civil war in Lebanon in search of a decent life, something every human deserves. Growing up in the US was a challenge in terms of finding a way to keep my heritage as a Palestinian while adapting to American culture: an issue that I continue to struggle with on a daily basis.

During my college years, I began to explore my culture and history, not only as a Palestinian, but also in terms of being an Arab woman and a Christian. It still amazes me that people believe that all Arabs are Muslim. The struggle for our homeland is something I was born with and will always be a part of my existence. The second intifada has taken a major toll on me as I see my people suffer and struggle for an independence that is so rightly theirs.

No one needs to tell me that the world is unfair. Understanding the history of my people and absorbing the events unfolding on a daily basis in Occupied Palestine and Israel, I grasp this reality. Watching the twin towers crumble to the ground, knowing that my own cousin works on the 96th floor sent shocking horror running through my body. In a sense, I can now relate to my parents' shock after the bloody massacres in Sabra, Shatila and their own refugee camp. It's odd how history repeats itself in such ironic ways.

Just as there is no justice for the Palestinians, I also feel that there is none for the Americans whose lives were lost during the attacks of September 11. However, I witness a growing animosity towards Arabs with much dismay, considering that it is probably my people and I who could relate most to those events. Walking down the streets of Las Vegas, I recently noticed strange looks and whispers from people when I

was speaking Arabic. Family members and friends of Arab descent being arrested for unknown reasons, harassed by the police or beaten up for wearing the Islamic hijab really makes me question whether the 'Land of the Free' is another fatality that crumbled alongside the towers. My parents have even asked me not to wear my Palestine charm or the beautiful necklace of my name in Arabic which they gave me for Christmas. They once again feel scared to be who they are and are even more afraid for me.

There is a bottom line to this though and it is because of this that I am once again stuck and confused. My people, both Palestinians and Americans, have suffered terrible injustices from people who care little about humanity, life, freedom, and justice. These people have set agendas to conquer and rule at any cost. In this sense, as Americans and Palestinians we are both victims. However, we have not come together in unity to fight against this evil, but have let it create further deterioration of understanding and tolerance. With both peoples having the experience of what it is to be terrorized, there is great need for empathy and co-operation between Americans and Palestinians. Yet, we have let these malicious forces with their agendas of power come between us. Will there ever be an end to this vicious cycle? I truly doubt it, especially when we are not trying to understand each other. In the end, the wicked powers seek to enlarge the gap between us and further torture the innocent on a daily basis as is happening in the West Bank and Gaza.

I've always been a very proud Palestinian American, but now I feel that this combination is becoming unfeasible, and it's truly sad. However, I continue to hope that one day there will be awareness, rather than stereotypes. Maybe then we will all have the capacity to defeat this terrorism from which both Americans and Palestinians have suffered so much.



Suzan Sahori was educated in Palestine and in the US, and has taught in England and lived in Germany. She lives and works in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem and has two daughters.

I lived through the first Intifada, which broke out in 1987, and I can still remember vividly the variety of harassment we endured from Israeli soldiers when I was a child. Now my two daughters are experiencing the second, and today

the methods of oppression are different and more deadly.

The catalyst for the first Intifada was a car accident: a lorry killed four Palestinians in Gaza. The second: Sharon's visit to Al-Aqsa. Do not imagine that these are the real reasons behind our fight. You must understand that the only reason for our struggle is the continuing illegal occupation of our land.

Since the terror attacks in the States, Israel has used them as a means to justify their brutalization of us. Their racist, colonial oppression of Palestinians masquerades under the name of the 'fight against terror'. How far will Sharon go under this banner? How much more support will we see from Bush? Sharon continues unchecked with his daily aggression against the Palestinian people, no voice is raised in criticism. How far will he go with his terrorist acts? How long can our President, Arafat, be ignored?

The attacks against the US have made life even worse for us. Initially the Arab world was courted as a supporter for the 'war on terror'. But now the West has got what it wanted, so we have been thrown back on Sharon's mercy, something we know only too well he does not possess. I fear that Sharon will never accept giving us our freedom and our own independent state. I believe he will do all within his power to escalate the political situation to his advantage in the name of security for Israel.

Would you accept living under occupation and a continued siege that strangles the very life out of you? Would you accept the humiliation we face daily? I don't think so. So why should we?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is deeply rooted in historical, religious and political factors. Do we need another fifty years to get to a simple mutual recognition?

The burden on women as mothers is so great, I do not know how to deal with my children who are becoming more aggressive and emotional. They say 'Mama, we are bored, please take us out'; when warplanes fly overhead at night they are terrified. They are too young to understand that we live under military occupation and all our towns are under siege. Every day I wonder what they have to look forward to in this land of violence and bloodshed, and within a Christian minority in Palestine. The only activities they can engage in are Sunday School visits, maybe a small picnic; a day out at the Shepherd's Fields, enjoying some peace, is a joy. I am so terrified



for our children's future. What is left for them to remember of their childhood except terror and fear?

Wafaa Shaheen and Trees Zbidat-Kosterman after some study days, tired...

All I ask of you is this. Take a minute to think about the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and try to go deeper and understand the real cause of our suffering. End the illegal occupation and end the terror against Palestinians, then we can work for peace, security and stability on an equal footing. Violence breeds violence and the illegal occupation of our land was the first step on the bloody path to the terrible scenes we bear witness to each day.



Rania Awwad, Palestinian-American activist from George Washington University in Washington, DC, writes about women's non-violent resistance.

One feature of the current intifada against Israeli occupation of Palestine is the unprecedented, widespread participation of women — Palestinian and Israeli alike — in promoting a peaceful and just resolution to the conflict.

Palestinian women have used nonviolent resistance as a political tool since the beginning of the last century. During the British Mandate period in the early 1920s, they organized petitions to the British government and held mass demonstrations against British policy in Palestine. After the establishment of Israel, when nearly one million Palestinians were driven from

their homes, Palestinian women led the way in organizing the kinds of services and support networks that would be needed to keep this new refugee population alive.

Today, women continue to assume important roles in leading peaceful demonstrations and setting up popular relief committees. The intifada has also created numerous opportunities for encounters and joint ventures between women on both sides. Together they have succeeded in removing Israeli army blockades and filling in trenches — practices routinely undertaken by the Israeli army to inhibit Palestinian freedom of movement. In other actions, they

have placed their own lives in danger by lying down in front of army bulldozers or chaining themselves to olive trees in efforts to prevent the destruction of Palestinian homes and property.

While there is reason to be encouraged by these efforts, alliances between Palestinian and Israeli women are fragile and face constant challenges. Particularly important for the development of these and similar resistance movements will be the presence of international observers to protect against intimidation and assure nonviolent activists of international solidarity with their struggle. □

Al-Zahraa, established in 1997 by a group of women activists, is a member of Al-Ittijah, the Union of Arab Community-Based Associations. For information or to offer moral and financial support, contact alzahraa44@hotmail.com.

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Telephone 972-4-6747148 Fax 972-4-6747686

Bank account 969346, Mercantile Discount Bank 687 (Attn: Al-Zahraa), Sakhnin 20173, Israel

For a current account of the oppression of Palestinians within Israel, see Marwan Bishara *Palestine/Israel: Peace or Apartheid* Zed Press, 2001 and www.adalah.org Adalah ('Justice'): The Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel and www.arabhra.org Nazareth Human Rights Association. Look up Sakhnin on www.palestineremembered.com

Supporting Palestinian women

With the Palestinian economy ruined by closure, many women's only income comes from traditional embroidery skills. For information on buying craft work, trips to Palestine with the International Solidarity Movement and other campaigns contact London@palestinecampaign.org and see www.palestinecampaign.org

Some resources:

www.pal-pwvs.org (Palestinian Working Women's Society for Development)

www.pal-watc.org (Women's Affairs Technical Committee)

www.j-c-w.org (Jerusalem Centre for Women)

www.nisaa.org (Arab Women's Forum)

www.wclac.org (Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling)

www.wameed.org (Women's Studies Centre)

www.batshalom.org/Jerusalem link

www.mend-pal.org (Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy Centre, Jerusalem)

www.miftah.org (the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy)

Rana Khoury *Palestinian Women and the Intifada* International Centre, Bethlehem, 1995

Rosemary Sayigh 'Palestinian Women: Triple Burden, Single Struggle' in Kahmsin ed. *Palestine: Profile of an Occupation* Zed Books, 1989

T. Mayer, ed. *Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Politics of Change* Routledge, 1994.

K. Warnock *Land before Honour: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories* Monthly Review Press, 1990

Naming male violence

In this brief reflection on global responses to the attacks on the US, and events in the Middle East, Elizabeth Carola comments on the marked absence of a feminist perspective.

I grew up in New York without a sculptural memory of the World Trade Centre — it was built when I was 12, so my consciousness of the skyline and the shape of the city predates the towers. I was also, as a radical teenager, always 'against' what they stood for. I always hated them and felt they were ugly and intrusive. Then I learned the word patriarchal. Still later came consciousness around the dealings within — the knowledge, for many of us, that however shocking the attack, twice as many perish every day from poverty in a global market saturated with US arms; that the banks and investment companies populating the World Trade Centre actively generated these problems. The unspoken and unquestioned assumption that an American life is worth 50 times more notice, attention and retribution than a Sudanese, Angolan, Iraqi, Somali, Afghan life. The construction of post September 11 debate in terms which silenced any fundamental challenge.

This is where the left stands. And, however marginalised, there is still a left. But feminist ideas about recent events, which take it further, are even more comprehensively silenced. Ideas like: the understanding of the events of September 11, terrorism and state terrorism as male violence. Understanding this scenario as men locked into their own macho, nihilistic battleground. A feminist analysis enables us to be anti-capitalist, anti-Bush and Blair, while also condemning the behaviour of men on the 'other side'. Jointly condemning the atrocities of Sharon, Hamas and Hizbollah. Yes, Sharon has the might of US policy behind him, but both parties function within a similar psychological framework, neither appearing to care about the future of their states or their peoples. A (non-sectarian) feminist analysis can condemn para-military violence. Can see the connections between militarism and fundamentalism, between 'godly' religious fundamentalism and 'godless' corporate fundamentalism. And knows both as instruments of the control and repression of women.

I went on the International Solidarity Movement delegation to Palestine last December, which felt valuable and myth-dispelling, both for me and (I hope) for the scores of Palestinians I talked to, coming out as Jewish and, sometimes, lesbian. I also had good talks with the other feminists on the delegation — what is the Palestine we are helping fight for anyway? Once Sharon is gone (soon, Inshallah), where will women be in the (re)building of the State? Will Palestine implement Muslim Shariah law that is spreading throughout Africa and the Middle East? Or Wahabi social codes? Will these fascistic, constructed notions of Islam gain ascendancy? In times of crisis, women's issues and voices are always subordinated. Women are still expected to wait until 'after the revolution'. But what would it be like if that were not so? If the International Solidarity delegates in Palestine, forming human shields for ambulances, refugee camps, villages, were to name IDF behaviour as male violence? What if we also named PLO brutality (of which there has been plenty) as male violence?

Andrea Dworkin, writing on how the Israeli State and military have consciously modeled Occupation tactics on Nazi sadism (*Scapegoat: The Jews, Israel and Women's Liberation*, Free Press, 2000) was censored with swift dispatch, denied distribution, publicity and access to the chains (see www.andreadworkin.com). But it is not news to us that public policy is shaped by and parallels psychological constructs of patriarchy, including heavily sexualised violence and hierarchy.

What if we forced these ideas into public discourse? Phrases like 'the eroticisation of authority' don't meet with a lot of understanding these days. We need to think about how we can get women's voices, ideas and issues heard. Here and in the centres of crisis: Palestine, Iraq, a vengeful, terrifying America. □

Fundamentally fascist

Marieme Hélie-Lucas is founder and was for many years co-ordinator of Women Living Under Muslim Laws, an international coalition of women living in Muslim countries and communities fighting for the rights of women and opposed to religious fundamentalism. She is an Algerian exile living in Europe. T&S interviewed her back in 1984 about the situation in Algeria, when the state introduced a new Family Code inspired by fundamentalist ideology, which was severely restricting women's rights. After September 11 we wanted to hear her views, in the light of her long experience of observing and combating fundamentalism from women's point of view.

Sophie Laws: *What impact has September 11 and the subsequent US-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan had on your work, on the network?*

Marieme Hélie-Lucas: We have for years have been saying to the world, 'Beware of fundamentalists, they are not religious, they couldn't care less about religion. If you confront them on their interpretation of religion, they do not respond. They are fascists. They are extreme right political movements of a fascist nature, like Nazis they use physical elimination of opponents and various "Untermensch" (those seen as inferior), praise of a mythical past, and other elements of fascism we have known through the years. Far from being backward they are modernists and capitalists. As Bob Dylan would put it, they have "God on My Side"'. And we also told the world that Islam and fundamentalism are two different things. This is why I don't use the term 'Islamist'.

Islam is an ideology, a religion, a philosophy.

It's not applied. It's thought, utopia, not action. It's very important to distinguish between this theoretical and ideological level and what people actually do in the name of an ideology, hence the very much-needed distinction between Islam and Muslims. Muslims are the real people doing real things, in fact very different things around the world under the same religious banner and ideology. What Muslims actually do, with whatever ideology they are provided with, varies hugely around the world. And then you have a third category: the fundamentalists who are an extreme right political movement using religion for their own political purposes, picking and choosing, eventually seeking in the religious text what suits them. These people do not know and do not care about religion. They use from the Koran and Hadith whatever suits them. Unfortunately, at present, they also export traditions from one country to another, traditions that may or may not have anything to do with religion, as we will see later.

First let's look at religious interpretations. For example, on marriage and polygamy, the Koran says that men can have four wives (and as many concubines as they want) provided they treat their wives perfectly equally. In Tunisia, the civil authorities hence decided as early as 1956 that nobody human could manage to treat four wives perfectly equally. For them the full sentence in the Koran thus conveys the idea that the Koran does not allow polygamy. In Algeria, the next door country, the government decided in 1984 that the same sentence in the Koran is interpreted as allowing polygamy. From this example, one can see that it's very important to distinguish what Muslims actually do from what Islam is supposed to say.

I mentioned in the interview we did in 1984 the fact that contraception and abortion were banned in Algeria despite the fact that we managed to get a fatwa' by the highest religious authority in Algeria, i.e. the High Islamic Council. This fatwa stated that contraception is perfectly permissible in Islam. It's politically understandable that, when such a fatwa was issued in 1963-64, shortly after the end of a bloody liberation war of seven years which killed two million people, the interest of the Algerian state at that time was to 'replace' all the people who died. This is the reason behind the decision of civil authorities to declare contraception un-Islamic and therefore illegal — despite the fatwa that we brought to the President. But in the 70s the enriched ruling classes felt threatened by the high population growth, especially the growing number of lumpen proletariat in Algeria, they then decided that contraception was perfectly Islamic all of a sudden and took the 1963-64 fatwa out of their drawer.

People in power manipulate religion and tradition; in both, they pick and choose what suits their purpose of the moment, and indeed, this changes in the course of history. So do the fascist fundamentalists: if you look at what they presently pick and choose, it's very serious.

For instance in Pakistan, they recently were trying to import a Maliki interpretation of religious law and a tradition that belongs to North Africa which is very much against women: a woman is never deemed an adult in the legal sense. She remains always a minor. She is not able to enter into a contract, in that sense. Subsequently, if a woman wants to marry, she has to be given in marriage by her 'matrimonial tutor' or wali, who is generally her father. The

father can be replaced by another man in the family, even her minor son, and if she is totally without family, a judge will be appointed as her wali. In Algeria or Morocco, it is part of the law of the state, but in recent years we have seen attempts to import it into the law of Pakistan. We have seen fathers going to court saying, 'My daughter married without my consent'. They are going to court while they have no grounds under Pakistani law. But Pakistani fundamentalists pretend that 'religious' law supersedes state law. Pakistani feminist organisations and lawyers have been fighting such cases on legal grounds and fathers have lost the cases. But they then recourse to crime and some have attempted to murder their daughters, thus appointing themselves both as judges and as executioners.

Similarly we have been seeing the introduction in the fundamentalist guerrilla camps in Algeria of what is called the 'mutaa' marriage. It is a marriage of 'pleasure', a 'temporary' marriage into which one can enter for a limited number of hours, days, months or years, determined by contract. Among other stipulations, it should require both parties' consent. It exists in Iran; it is a Shi'ite practice, which is unheard of in the Sunni tradition of North Africa, and Algeria in particular. But Algerian fundamentalists import it and then, when they raid villages and take the young women in sexual slavery, they claim it is not rape: they call it 'mutaa marriage' and pretend it is perfectly Islamic.

There are lots of such examples. For instance, in Sri Lanka some years ago fundamentalist groups, including fundamentalist women's groups, demanded the introduction of female genital mutilation (FGM) as part of an Islamic duty. As you can imagine, nobody in Sri Lanka, certainly not the Muslims, knew what it involved because it is totally alien to their culture. We all know that it has nothing to do with Islam, it is a cultural tradition: in the region of Africa where FGM is found, Christians and Animists practice it too. It is geographically limited to the sphere of influence of ancient Egypt where it originated from.

We have to ask ourselves why do fundamentalists pick these particular aspects of tradition or of religious practice and why do they, more and more, try to export them to other Muslim areas in the world? What we are seeing again and again in Muslim countries — and I am sure you can see it too in your own contexts — is an ultra conservative choice being operated by fundamen-



Family Code by Daiffa

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talists between all the cultural traditions, all the religious interpretations, to dig out what suits them and drop the rest. They discard all the positive traditions, be they religious or cultural, that could be used in favour of women. We witness an internationalisation of the fundamentalist movements in which the fundamentalists themselves define as the only true version of Islam all the worst traditions or interpretations of religion everywhere and pull them together, especially all the anti-women ones.

Women have fought both locally and internationally to resist such trends, by working at changing unjust laws and proposing new ones; by unveiling the actual non-religious origin of some bad practices; by calling on feminist theologians to redress erroneous interpretations of Islam; by taking perpetrators to court; and by alerting international bodies regarding the violations of women's human rights in our countries.

We in Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) are working on the early warning signs of the rise of fundamentalism in various countries. Fundamentalists generally come into a country through invading the educational system, by replacing the absent state in terms of social relief and social work, that is the entry point in general, and then they would move into terrorism, for instance. But if you tell the women in the countries where this is happening they say, no, not in my country, of course not. They don't see it. I remember when fundamentalism started growing in Algeria, I was one of the very few people who tried alerting people about it. Lots of my dear friends said, 'No, this is Algeria, a revolutionary country, what are you talking about? Of course not. Fundamentalists exist, but they are marginal'. Big mistake. I remember when we went to Tunisia, to alert Tunisian women, and Tunisian women had a similar blindness: 'come on, this is a very democratic country, we have the best laws of the Arab world, of course not'. I remember trying to alert Bosnian women, pointing at all the relief work fundamentalist groups were initiating after the war, all the schools they were opening where they enforced their version of religious education as well as compulsory classes in the Arabic language. And women would not believe me. Well, now it is clear to everybody that fundamentalists have their foot in ex-Yugoslavia and in the Muslim ex-Soviet republics.

Kabul students
from The Nation 2/12/01



Sophie: *Going back to the war in Afghanistan, I think most feminists were broadly anti-war, but some feminists felt torn about the situation, that it couldn't surely be a bad thing to intervene militarily against the Taliban.*

Marieme: Frankly, I don't think the US Government cares about the situation of women in Afghanistan, nor about human rights, nor about the state of democracy there. The things they care about are that there are no bombs in their own country and they can have their pipeline going through Afghanistan. Otherwise, if they were to care about such things, they would not replace the Taliban by the Northern Alliance. What is the real difference between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance? The only difference is that the Northern Alliance does not threaten US interests, but as far as fundamentalism goes they are just as fundamentalist. When they were in power, they behaved just like the Taliban. They have done absolutely horrible things to the population in general and to women in particular. There were mass rapes also, to the point that when the Taliban came to power they were seen as the salvation by the population: there are many testimonies about this state of mind, including from women's organisations and women who became victims of the Taliban. What the US has done is to replace anti-US Taliban with pro-US Taliban. Thank you! Big deal!

It is absolutely unbelievable that anyone can now see the US as a champion of women's rights and the war in Afghanistan as a war for the liberation of women, or for democracy. The US Government does not care about women. You can see this in the people they choose to negotiate with, and in the composition of the new Afghan government, with very few exceptions. The US Government did not acknowledge the fact that there are many progressive people in Afghanistan who fought for democracy under the Taliban: they did not look for them, they looked for ethnic balance, elders, the King, etc. to be represented. Were progressive people at the negotiation table? They are eradicated from the political scene by the US Government and by the international media. Where are all the educated women? Where are all the people who maintained schools for girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban? Where are all the medical doctors who gave treatment to women at the risk of their lives? Where are all the people who organised the circulation of information within Afghanistan and

outside? What place has the US Government given them in the new Afghanistan?

In Algeria it's the same — it's really tragic. The US Government does business with our local fundamentalists. There is no recognition of the existence of progressive forces that could represent a viable alternative to either fundamentalist fascists or to a corrupt government. There is such a strong women's movement in Algeria. There are all the anti-fundamentalist movements, there are the workers' unions, the independent journalists, the artists and intellectuals, the progressive parties. They have opposed the fundamentalists at the risk of their lives and many of them actually died at their hands. But it's as if this does not exist in the eyes of European and North American states, nor in the eyes of the international media, nor in the eyes of international human rights organisations. There's a projection of backwardness on our countries that serves a purpose; it serves to legitimate the intervention, to legitimate whatever powerful countries want to do in our countries to serve their own vested interests, while at the same time progressive forces have been denied support for a long, long time and this is still going on.

As in Afghanistan, one can see that in Algeria what the US Government cares about is its oil interests. That's why it has been trying to bring down the Algerian government and to push FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) into power. There was a very interesting study published by Graham Fuller four years ago, commissioned by the Rand Corporation — a US agency close to the defense of the US. What the study says in essence is that the US should support the coming to power of the fundamentalist party FIS, for the reason that fundamentalists do not threaten US economic interests in Algeria, especially in oil. The author wrote this; it's not my interpretation. Then the author goes on to say that the US is in a very good position to persuade European countries that FIS in power is also in their interests. And it ends with a small paragraph saying: of course we know that in this process human rights will be trampled and that women's rights will be curtailed under Sharia, but this is Algeria's internal affair, the US should not interfere. This is a wonderful summary of what they are doing in our countries for their own benefit. I do not think that anyone in civil society has yet understood that this is fascism and that it should be combated. Certainly at the level of governments, they could not care less.

I am really terrified that the US will bring war to other countries as a follow-up to the Afghan war. They certainly named the GIA (Islamic armed groups) — one of the armed branches of the FIS — as one of the forces they should have to deal with. So it is absolutely clear that the US are prepared to bomb everywhere, to bomb the population that has nothing to do with the GIA, which combated it and suffered under it, for their own interests, instead of supporting the democratic forces wherever they are. That is really the crucial part of it. They do not care what happens to us. In the current Afghan war they took the risk, for instance, that fundamentalist forces might take over in Pakistan. That was a real risk when the US requested, demanded, that Pakistan help the US forces. We were really scared of a nationalist reaction, hijacked by the Pakistani extreme right. Everybody was against the US intervention, the way it happened. Many of us would have loved to see the fundamentalists politically eradicated, but we knew that it would not be part of the programme of the US. They cannot care less about fundamentalists. They care about the portion of the fundamentalists who threaten US interests. The others can stay, they are most welcome as long as US interests are safely protected.

Sophie: *September 11 was widely perceived as a different kind of action by Muslim fundamentalists.*

Marieme: No, I don't think it's new. Paris has had so many bombs in the past years — in the metro, the trains — so it's not new in that sense. It happened in the US, that's what is new. One of the people who is known to be the financial organiser of the bombing of the metro in Paris at the beginning of the 1990s is in Britain, and the UK does not respond to requests for his extradition to France. To this day the man is still in the UK. Indeed it shows how the European powers and the US want to negotiate with the fundamentalists, regardless of their fascist principles and political stands. Otherwise these governments would take action against them. But they barely do it. They don't even co-operate with each other. Fundamentalist leaders and organisers have settled all over Europe for years and years. We know who is where, moving from one country to another. When one country feels the need to say, 'hey, this is too much and we cannot tolerate you here' they just go to the next European country and live there.

In France many of them have had asylum while virtually none of the people who went into exile because they were threatened and attacked by fundamentalists got asylum. I can tell you none of the progressive Algerians I know personally has asylum, all of them victims of the fundamentalists. Meanwhile many fundamentalists have asylum in France. The interpretation of international law on asylum is clear: one is eligible for asylum when one is persecuted by the state. There is no denying that fundamentalists are victims of state repression in Algeria (but so were the Left generally for many decades and they did not get asylum at that time either). However the international law on asylum also clearly establishes that if one is a perpetrator — a violator — one cannot benefit from asylum. This second part of the law is not applied. What European and North American countries are doing is using one part of the law for political purposes and ignoring the second part. If the law as a whole had been considered, fundamentalists could not be granted asylum because they are violators, perpetrators of crimes against humanity — as well as, in some instances, victims of the state.

Asylum laws were thought of at a time when wars were taking place between official armies of different nations. This is less and less the case in the world today: we now witness more and more wars, including with modern arms such as Kalachnikovs and missiles, involving non-state actors. (Think of Rwanda, of Algeria.) Despite this change, asylum laws are not yet applied to cases when citizens are persecuted by non-state actors, as is the case in Algeria. Human rights organisations have been playing a terrifying role in this respect. Based on the principle that only states are signatories of international agreements therefore only they can be held accountable under international law, human rights organisations have been supporting fundamentalists as victims of the state, without adequately addressing their role as violators of ordinary citizens. Though of course everyone including fascists should be guaranteed a fair trial, no torture, no extra judicial killings, etc, it's very hard to understand why the political existence of non-state actors isn't taken into account. Women have done a lot of work on this issue at the level of the International Criminal Court.

Sophie: How do you see the Al-Qaida network in relation to the broader forces of fundamental-

ism within the Muslim world? Do you think they are important?

Marieme: I can draw a parallel with the GIA in Algeria. The GIA was most probably trained by the Al Qaida network. All these forces are autonomous but they start from the same root and support each other, financially as well as in armaments and training of troops, not to speak of media. So, isolating Al-Qaida and putting all the blame on Al-Qaida while not tackling the fact that your so-called moderate Islamists are sitting in London or in Manchester makes no sense to me. Who is more to blame? The poor guy who earns his food by being part of the GIA, for instance, because he has blood on his hands? Or the ideologist who created the whole system, recruits them, raises money for arms and everything that is needed in this terrorist movement? Or the European and North American governments who give them asylum and the human rights organisations that give them a political platform? Our GIA would not exist on the ground without all this backing. I think that just attacking terrorism in isolation doesn't make sense. These groups include all shades from the very well behaved people who speak in international fora — all the shades down to the poor guy who actually holds the gun or the knife in his hand and actually commits all these terrible crimes. I do not see how it's only the last one of the chain who is to blame. Certainly, the ideologists of the fundamentalist movement did speak to all the international human rights organisations and lobbied them for so many years, that these organisations now fail to see that they are fascists.

I have seen and known when I was in exile in Morocco towards the end of the liberation struggle of Algeria some of the young men, very often less than 20, who were the executioners of the FLN (National Liberation Front) and of the ALN, (National Liberation Army). I know they were destroyed by what they had to do, by what they were asked to do, they were totally destroyed, they were having nightmares all the time — they were very young people. The Nazis too forcibly recruited younger and younger boys in their army; those boys are victims, as much as perpetrators. My experience with the young executioners of the ALN makes me think that, although I don't want to exonerate anyone from killing anybody, I cannot accept that the man with the knife in hand, the gun in hand, the poor guy, the young guy, maybe the illiterate guy, is

more responsible and more accountable than the man in London or in Washington DC giving orders, recruiting, raising funds and lobbying international human rights organisations. Those organisers with clean hands should be held accountable for the crimes committed on the ground.

Sophie: I wanted to ask a specific question about the Palestinians. A lot of commentators have been saying that that situation is part of what feeds the Muslim world's problem with the US. I wonder how that looks from your perspective?

Marieme: The war, the bombing of Afghanistan has reinforced, if at all it was needed, the anti-US feeling that is common in the third world, and not just in Muslim countries. People in Latin America, Asia and Africa have the same gut level anti-US feeling. The reaction to the situation in Palestine and Israel has to do with this anti-US feeling. Now, let me be clear: to me, Israel is a colonial state, there is no doubt about that. New people coming in in force, and either forcibly taking the land, or 'buying' it when people are so poor that they will sell it for a piece of bread, and then pushing them out, this is plain and simple colonisation. It is what happened in South Africa, in Algeria and in Israel (not to speak of the whole of Latin America, where the near eradication of indigenous people fully succeeded, to the point that the sons and daughters of Spaniards and Italians there are now claiming to be the indigenous people). Those are three places where there has been something called in French 'colonisation de peuplement' — settlers' colonisation, where people come and stay; colonisers do not just come, exploit the wealth of the country and go. They put down their roots. Nobody can deny this about Israel; it's a historical fact.

At the moment, the international media point at what the Israeli army is doing to the Palestinian population and it is indeed horrendous — killings, destruction, expulsions. But the media do not point at the colonial root of the present problem. At the same time what we can see is that the legitimate nationalist response of the Palestinians has been progressively but surely hijacked by extreme right fundamentalist forces within the Palestinian opposition to Israel. As everywhere, when facing a terrible situation, there can be a response from the left or from the right, and when people respond from the right

you have Nazism.

What we witness in Palestine now is the national struggle slowly moving out of the hands of secular people — who were eventually ready to share territory with the Israelis on democratic grounds — into the hands of extreme right forces working under the banner of religion, such as Hamas. And therefore it becomes increasingly difficult for the progressive forces within the Palestinian population to go on with their national demands for democracy, for land, for rights and to distance themselves from the main trend, which is the fundamentalist trend. They are in a terrible position. We salute both those Palestinians who, today, maintain human and political contacts with their progressive anti-fascist counterparts in Israel, and those Israelis who demonstrate daily against the occupation of Palestinian territory by the Israeli army, the refuseniks, the Women in Black against war, etc. Both deserve our deepest admiration for their courage, their political integrity and their antifascist commitment.

As mentioned earlier about Algeria and Afghanistan, the media do not give the progressive forces any visibility. Similarly in Israel, where I have been in touch with progressive forces for more than 30 years, the many courageous people there working so hard, at the risk of their lives, in alliance with progressive people on the Palestinian side, against their own Jewish fundamentalists and their own extreme right government, are not given any visibility. How often do you see accounts of their various actions in the newspapers? What I want to say here is: 'We are the alternative. Give us a chance'. Last year there was a wonderful young Israeli woman, 29 years old: when the Israeli soldiers were encircling Palestinian villages in the night and firing at everybody, this woman just armed herself with a loudspeaker, went every night into Palestinian villages, and locked herself in with the Palestinians. And when the Israeli troops encircled the villages, she would speak to them through the loudspeaker, explaining that she was an Israeli Jewish citizen, that she was inside as a human shield and that if the army fired at the village, which was illegal, they might kill her, and it would have legal consequences. Those are the people we should be talking about and with.

Sophie: Is there more you would like to tell us about what is happening in Algeria?

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

Marieme: The social movement is growing. There is a lot of social protest against the government — rightly so of course. Unfortunately, it is often hijacked by fundamentalists. Any of the organisers of the Berber cultural and social protests that took place last summer will tell you that beyond a certain point, the demonstrations were hijacked by young people who looked well organised, and they had no control over it. And of course, there is a continuous women's protest, because despite what was promised by the new president Bouteflika, the Family Code passed in 1984 when we did our last interview, has not been changed. This means that women still cannot marry, they have to be given in marriage by their wali; women cannot initiate divorce, only husbands have this right; women cannot have guardianship of their children upon divorce, they can only have custody under the constant control of their ex-husbands and provided they do not remarry; women have half the share of inheritance that their brothers have; polygamy (up to four wives) and repudiation are the privilege of men. The government compromised with the fundamentalists in 1984 on the question of women's rights, and continues to do so — basically that is what it amounts to.

I know that people in France and England believe that the fundamentalists are not in power and defend their democratic right to be represented, but they were and are part of the government. For many many years they have had one third of the national assembly, and several ministers. So, they are democratically represented. Indeed they are. But fundamentalists are not for democracy, as they clearly stated before the legislative elections in Algeria: their political leadership publicly declared on several occasions that if they were to win there would not be any other elections because democracy is 'kofir'. Kofir means blasphemy. They said: if we have the law of God, we do not need the law of people. These are the kind of statements we heard from the three leading figures of FIS, before the elections. That is why, when the government cancelled the second round of the election, they had the active support of democratic forces.

What is unpleasantly striking to me is that, in Europe, the stopping of the election was seen as the end of democracy in Algeria. But don't forget that Hitler was elected and this was not for the best of democracy. Don't forget that Franco in Spain or Salazar in Portugal stayed for 50 years with no elections, just dominating the scene.

Fascists, when they come to power, are very hard to get rid of. In that sense, although it is sad to consider that fascists can be elected, a lot of democrats, in the broad sense, supported, and in fact requested the Algerian government to stop the election, because they did not want Hitler to come to power. People in Europe do not see the difference between democracy, the aim, and the means to get democracy (elections), which can be perverted. I'm not saying that to defend the decision of the government, because it is quite clear that it stopped the elections for its own purposes and certainly not to defend democracy but to remain in power. However in the process, there is no denying that we have avoided having our own Taliban in power in Algeria today. Women are the last ones that would regret it.

I have nothing good to say about the Algerian successive governments which were all undemocratic and more and more corrupt over the years. However maybe I can make a comparison that will make sense: if my only choice is between Margaret Thatcher and Hitler, I think no one should deny me the right to choose Thatcher, even at the risk of putting an end to the electoral process. I believe European Jews, who paid such a high price for Hitler being 'democratically' elected, would not contradict me. It's not the government we would like to have, but fascism is much worse. We have a very undemocratic government. It's probably much worse than Margaret Thatcher. However it's not Hitler. The fundamentalists are Hitlers.

Sophie: *How do you feel that women in the UK and the West can support women who are more directly affected by fundamentalists' attacks on women's rights?*

Marieme: We need visibility. The progressive forces in Europe and North America should support us as the alternative to either corrupt undemocratic governments or extreme right fascist fundamentalist forces. We exist. But we have no voice outside our own country, outside our independent media, which are accessible to international media but which they choose to ignore. Act against fundamentalist non-state actors. And demand from your government that it deals with so-called 'moderate' Islamists, as you people call them — I call them fascists — who are sitting in your country and devising, planning, plotting, financing the crimes the poor guys on the ground are going to commit. Not only poor guys but young guys. Just remember

the Nazis also recruited very young people. These young boys have no ideological defense. Our youth is revolted, and rightly so, by the situation they live in, by the inequalities, by the fake democracy, by the corruption, by the arrogance of the government and the ruling classes they represent; but their revolt is being hijacked and manipulated by extreme right political forces.

Give visibility to women, their continuous struggle both against the anti-women laws passed by our governments, and against our fascist fundamentalists who launched a real femicide in Algeria throughout the nineties and would do it again if they had a chance. But more generally give visibility to the democratic forces that the women's movement is part of in our countries. I mean democratic in the very large sense. The anti-fascist forces. Don't let human rights organisations speak in the defense of fundamen-

talists outside the strict defense of their human rights, do not allow human rights organisations to give them a political platform under the disguise of human rights, as they have been doing for so long now. And don't let the leaders of fundamentalists sit in your countries, be received as diplomats, negotiate with ministers, negotiate with the heads of human rights organisations. Don't let them be given a political platform from where they can develop their ideas about women, and about democracy — in the name of God. Don't ever forget what the buckles of the belts of the SS in the Nazi Party were engraved with: 'Gott mit uns', 'God with us'. That is exactly the banner of fundamentalists. You have every historical reason not to be fooled by their religious claims, to identify them as fascists and to help us combat them, be it in Algeria or in Afghanistan, in Israel or in Palestine. □

WLUML statement on the current situation in Palestine/Israel

The international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is well placed to identify extreme Right political projects hidden under religious/ethnic agendas and their devastating effects on progressive forces at large and on women in particular.

The present escalation in Palestine/Israel is not due to a conflict between religious and ethnic communities. Clearly, it is the result of the coming to power in Israel of extreme Right forces mercilessly bent on implementing a colonial project.

Unfortunately, its brutality sparked off the hijacking of the legitimate protest and struggle of the Palestinians by extreme right fundamentalist forces within them. We know from experience that the rise of such forces will inevitably work against the interests of people, especially minorities and women in Palestine.

The text of the complete statement can be found at www.wlum.org

The Women Living Under Muslim Laws International Solidarity Network (WLUML) was founded in 1984. WLUML is a network that links women from around the world whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws, customs and practices said to be derived from Islam and that are selectively used by political forces.

WLUML uses a variety of intervention strategies to build linkages and break women's isolation: **It collects, analyzes and circulates information** regarding women's diverse experiences and strategies in Muslim countries and communities, using a variety of methods and media including printed publications (both regular and occasional). Information activities also involve the proactive documentation and analysis of trends, experiences and strategies with the aim of strengthening local and international struggles.

Networking is used to link women across the network and link women with the wider feminist and human rights movement as well as provide support for local struggles. Horizontal linkages — i.e. putting women in direct contact with each other rather than centralized linkages through the network coordination offices — are emphasized wherever possible.

Collective projects identify and articulate issues of common concern. The decisions regarding WLUML's priority activities as a network are taken collectively according to the specific needs expressed by active networkers who come together regularly to formulate the network's Plans of Action.

Solidarity actions, in the shape of international alerts for action, campaigns and support provided in response to specific appeals (e.g. linking individual women with legal advice and support institutions), recognize that the provision of concrete support and intervention is vital for the promotion of women's human rights.

Capacity building is undertaken to strengthen the network's ability to generate, circulate, analyze and use information; to articulate and disseminate alternative points of view through more effective use of communications technology; to facilitate specific training programmes; to develop outreach programmes that can lead to positive social and legal change; and to strengthen international linkages.

More specifically, the work currently undertaken by WLUML articulates itself around the issues that were prioritized during its 1997 strategic planning (the Dhaka Plan of Action). The main themes on which the network focuses are: 1) the continuing rise of fundamentalisms; 2) militarization/armed conflicts and impact on women in Muslim societies; and 3) sexuality.

Notes

¹ A fatwa is a religious opinion given by someone whose expertise in the field of religion is widely known and recognized.

² Graham E. Fuller 'Algeria: the Next Fundamentalist State?' Arroyo Center for the US Army, Rand Corporation, 1996. Summary available on the internet: www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR733/

Spiritual warfare:

Women, the Religious Right, and new world orders in the wake of 9/11

Mab Segrest is a writer, teacher and activist. In the 1980s, she served as Coordinator of North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence. As an open lesbian, she has campaigned against Klan and neo-Nazi movements and hate violence, and against the re-election of North Carolina's reactionary and homophobic Senator Jesse Helms. In the 1990s, she worked with the US Urban-Rural Mission, a program of the World Council of Churches. Next year she will be Acting Chair of Gender and Women's Studies at Connecticut College. This is an edited version of a speech she gave at a teach-in at the University of North Carolina entitled 'Women Fight Fundamentalism', shortly after the September 11 attacks. It is followed by her updated reflections on the political climate in the United States six months later.

I am reminded by recent events of Bertolt Brecht's observation:

Those who lead the country into the abyss
Call ruling too difficult
For ordinary [humans].¹

Tonight, I can share my grief with any of you who read in the fireball of the World Trade Center the fires now raining down on Kabul, on Jalalabad. My grief is for all the people bombed and bleeding, in Manhattan or Kabul, and for the mountains and the sand and forests and fields and concrete also blasted. And I grieve for language, for the fragile human grasp at meanings, that propaganda blasts of an endless war for 'enduring freedom' also seek to obliterate. The fragment of a poem by Carolyn Forcé is pinned to my wall:

There is a cyclone fence between
Ourselves and the slaughter and behind it
We hover in a calm protected world like
Netted fish, exactly like netted fish.
It is either the beginning or the end
Of the world, and the choice is ourselves
Or nothing.²

Many commentators refer to September 11 as the end of 'American innocence', a claim I find remarkable given US history. I despair of a national memory that seems always encrypted with amnesia, a national emotion laced with anesthesia, a media-guided grief. What is it in the 'American' psyche that resists global knowledge, empathy, or memory? President Bush is making hugely oversimplified moral arguments about 'good' (ours) and 'evil' (theirs). Such reasoning

precludes even the most cursory examination of US foreign policy, which suggests a causal connection between their 'evil' and our 'good.' Such an examination might make us 'safer', I think, than stockpiling Cipro in case of anthrax attacks.

US right-wing leaders over the past two decades have used religious arguments in a 'culture war'. They have waged popular campaigns against affirmative action, AIDS funding, all art that functions as cultural critique, immigrants of color, women's right to control our bodies, and civil rights for lesbians and gay men. It was as though they had dropped depth charges into great cultural crevices — and if, from deep within the earth, the explosions erupted in our families, schools, neighborhoods, or legislatures, separating sister from brother, parent from child — it was of no matter, because it fed their long-term strategy and their immediate gain. And if these depth charges threw up bloody little generals in countries remote from our imagination, that was no matter either.

Now US bombs fall on Afghanistan, shattering bodies, houses, towns, a landscape already nearly obliterated by war. And if the quakes are felt in communities across the globe — as riots in Nigeria or Pakistan or Palestine or Delhi, as shelling in Kashmir — that does not seem to matter, either, because these tragedies and violent disruptions are not in the US plan for 'infinite justice'.

I am not the first to note the eerie resonances between the posturings of Osama Bin Laden and George W. Bush. Indian novelist Arundhati Roy captured this in her brilliant 'The Algebra of Infinite Justice' in *The Guardian*:

Now Bush and Bin Laden have even begun to borrow each other's rhetoric. Each now refers to the other as 'the head of the snake'. Both invoke God and use the loose millennialist currency of good and evil as their terms of reference. Both are engaged in unequivocal political crimes. Both are dangerously armed — one with the nuclear arsenal of the obscenely powerful, the other with the incandescent, destructive power of the utterly hopeless.³

Researchers explain what they call the 'theocratic right' in the US in ways that amplify these resonances:

A theocrat is someone who supports a form of government where the actions of leaders are seen as sanctioned by God... The central threat to democracy posed by the theocratic right is not that its leaders are religious, or fundamentalist, or right wing — but that they

justify their political, legislative, and regulatory agenda as fulfilling God's plan.⁴

The religious right and Goldwater's Republican Party

Given the demonization of Islamic fundamentalism of late, I think it is helpful to trace the impact of Christian fundamentalism on the Republican Party that is now heading up the response to 9*11. Sara Diamond argues that there has been a 'growing symbiosis between mass movements of evangelical Christians and the Republican Party,' and through the Republicans with the state.⁵ This symbiosis originated in 1964, with the resounding defeat of Barry Goldwater in the Presidential campaign. Goldwater activists then set to work to build a broad-based right-wing conservative movement, which came to be called the New Right. In 1968, George Wallace's ten million votes in his Independent run for President showed the potential for reactionary populism in racist terms. The Religious Right were to harness Christian fundamentalism into this New Right configuration with an emphasis on issues of gender and sexuality, such as homosexuality and abortion.

The year 1979 is considered a bellwether for formation of the Religious Right: Goldwater activists persuaded Jerry Falwell, who had a large church and television ministry, that he should mobilize the evangelical base into a 'moral majority' to shape the Republican platform in the 1980 election. This would build on earlier campaigns against the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion rights, and lesbian and gay rights. Christian fundamentalists brought into New Right politics extensive grassroots organization and religious broadcast networks. By 1979, Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcast Network was spending \$50 million annually and reaching five million people. They now set out to tap the 20–33 per cent of the US adult population who professed to be 'born again'.⁶

The Protestant leadership of the Religious Right quickly extended its alliances to conservative Catholics on questions of abortion, and to Mormons, whom they had previously considered outside the pale.

YOU PUT RELIGION IN
YOU PUT CONTRACEPTION OUT
MEN STAND FORWARD
WOMEN SHUFFLE OUT
TAKE GOSPEL AS GOSPEL
EXCOMMUNICATE DEBATE AND DOUBT
OH CRAPPY CRAPPY CLAP-TRAP
OH CRAPPY CRAPPY CLAP-TRAP



The Reagan years — funding fundamentalism

A network of exorbitantly funded conservative think-tanks, media and non-profit advocacy and educational organisations helped bring Ronald Reagan into the presidency in 1980 with a conservative Republican congress. The broad New Right agenda had three prongs: (1) an economic program of massive tax cuts for the wealthy coupled with cuts in social spending; (2) state enforcement of the 'traditional family'; and (3) an anti-Communist militarist foreign policy. All three were to have a profound effect on women's lives.

Religious Right activists were disappointed by the Reagan administration's failure to pass a constitutional amendment against abortion, or the Family Protection Act, a bill with an anti-woman and anti-gay agenda.⁷ In spite of the disappointments, most of the Religious Right was held within the Reagan administration by a focus on anti-communism. The links between Christian fundamentalism's domestic policies on gender and sexuality and its involvement in foreign policy are especially relevant in the wake of 9*11, as the administration resuscitates a Cold War paradigm to deal with Terror, with one rationale the rescue of Afghan women from the Taliban.

In January 1981, Reagan's Secretary of State Alexander Haig announced that a concern for human rights would no longer dictate US foreign policy, and it was replaced by concern for the threat of 'international terrorism'. Pat Robertson used his Christian Broadcasting Network to raise money for the Nicaraguan Contras and to lobby for military aid for the junta in El Salvador and for General Efraim Rios Montt, the dictator of Guatemala who had been converted to Protestant Pentecostalism by Gospel Outreach. Diamond quotes a Gospel Outreach pastor defending Rio Montt's killing of indigenous Guatemalans: 'The Army doesn't massacre the Indians. It massacres demons, and the Indians are demon possessed; they are communists.'⁸

In Afghanistan, the CIA and Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) 'launched the largest covert operation in the history of the CIA,' in order to 'harness the energy of Afghan resistance to the Soviets and expand it into a holy war, an Islamic jihad, which would turn Muslim countries within the Soviet Union against the communist regime,' according to Roy. Over the years, the CIA recruited and funded nearly

100,000 radical mojahedin from 40 Islamic countries in a jihad that spread to Kazoo, Chechnya, and Kashmir. 'The mojahedin ordered farmers to plant opium as a 'revolutionary tax.' The ISI set up hundreds of heroin laboratories across Afghanistan. Within two years of the CIA's arrival, the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland had become the biggest producer of heroin in the world. The annual profits were ploughed back into training and arming militants.'⁹

Having been traded for arms, drugs from Latin America showed up in US inner cities, just as heroin from Afghanistan hit European streets (NOTE: Roy says that Afghanistan was the chief supplier for the US, but I have read several sources since then that say differently: Afghan drugs go to Europe), showed up in US inner cities suffering economic devastation from an emerging 'post-industrial' economy and the Reagan administration's radical cuts in social spending. These changes hit women who were expected to hold the line in neighborhoods crumbling from structural unemployment, who would be pilloried by Ronald Reagan as 'welfare queens' and instructed to assume more 'personal responsibility' by welfare legislation which touted their forced participation in a 'full economy' of growing income stratification (all of this is called 'family values'). As Dr Nawal el Saadawi writes, 'When fundamentalism becomes powerful it is women, especially poor women, who suffer most. These movements direct their attacks against women and minority groups.'¹⁰

Right-wing strategy proved wildly successful. By 1994, the Christian Coalition, the largest and most influential of the Christian Right organizations, had 1,700 local chapters in 50 states, and the Religious Right had a \$2.5 billion budget for religious broadcasting. It exerted a major influence on Republican candidates and policy. Consider again the parallels. In 1995, the Taliban fought its way to power in Afghanistan from a marginal sect of hard-line fundamentalists. Funded by Pakistan's ISI, it unleashed a regime of terror, closing down girls' schools, dismissing women from government jobs, and enforcing sharia laws under which women deemed to be 'immoral' are stoned to death and widows guilty of being adulterous are buried alive.¹¹ 'Christian Reconstructionism' had emerged in the 1990s as the most radical form of US Christian fundamentalism. It would:

eliminate not only democracy but many of its manifestations, such as labor unions, civil

rights laws, and public schooling. Women would be relegated to the home. Insufficiently Christian men would be denied citizenship, perhaps executed. So severe is this theocracy that it would extend capital punishment to include blasphemy, heresy, adultery, and homosexuality.¹²

No wonder Bin Laden and Bush sound so much alike. Based on my experience with the US Religious Right, I agree with Dr Saadawi: 'The fundamentalist movements are a mask for other battles, and a distortion of all religions'.¹³

Reagonomics, structural adjustment and the New Right

My own relationship to the New Right emerged from feminist, anti-racist and lesbian activism in the 1970s. By the mid-1980s, I was increasingly aware of the connections between the growing domestic crisis and a broader global crisis. What I had been fighting for over a decade as a domestic backlash to the progressive movements of the 1960s, was a subplot deeply embedded in a larger narrative about capitalism and colonialism. In the early 1970s, many corporate decision-makers, faced with rising competition from overseas and falling profits, moved their factories to Third World countries, enticed by cheaper wages, more non-unionized, degraded working conditions, and generous tax benefits granted by neocolonial governments. Women were employed in larger and larger numbers in a gendered reconstitution of the global assembly line.

In the US, there was a parallel shift towards lower-paid and non-unionized service jobs in a 'feminized' workforce. This growing 'silent depression' in the US in the 1970s began to erode the middle class. Tax cuts benefited the wealthiest and fed a growing income stratification. With little public discussion about the huge shifts in the economy, many white people were easily influenced by scapegoating campaigns claiming 'reverse discrimination' from people of color, that lesbians and gays wanted 'special rights' and that 'welfare queens' were sinking the economy. The New Right had begun to perfect in the 1970s, and they go on today.

I also began to understand how 'structural adjustment' was the international equivalent for what we were fighting as 'Reagonomics' in the US. Beginning in the 1980s under Reagan, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank forced these 'structural adjustments' on Third World nations as a precondition for refinancing bad debts that had accumulated over

30 years of the World Bank's operations — debts often taken to finance expensive and unnecessary projects.

External debt for 'developing' countries grew from \$100 billion to \$600 billion from 1972 to 1980. In order to refinance these loans, governments had to agree, to cut wages, undercut labor standards, privatize national resources, and cut social programs. These policies (controlled by the US and Britain) paved the way for huge multinational corporations to have free access to the economies of Third World countries. The collapse and dispersal of the Soviet empire by the end of the 1980s opened the way for the complete globalization of neo-liberal capital. These programs increased the burden of work for women, who were pushed into deeper poverty and at times prostitution. They also bred authoritarian and militarist governments internationally, since it's hard for democracies to starve their people. In the US, a 'prison-industrial complex' increasingly incarcerated people of color in a racist 'war on drugs.' The deepening global poverty and alienation, the lack of democratic alternatives in the Middle East, and the continuing Israeli occupation of Palestine have, in turn, bred militant Islamic fundamentalist movements.

We are being told that the solution to all this is (1) more war, then (2) bringing the Islamic world into 'modernity'. But, if modernity is to be equated with capitalism, then both have meant a hyper development of the colonizers and the elites on the one hand, and new extremes of poverty for those whom Franz Fanon called 'the wretched of the earth' on the other. That modernity Afghanistan has had quite enough of.¹⁴ The US military now brings to Afghanistan the latest in weapons technology.

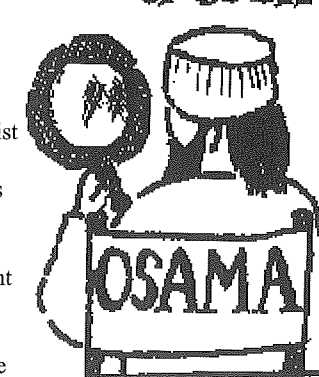
But, with another view, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld explicated:

This war will not be waged by a grand alliance united for the single purpose of defeating an axis of hostile powers. Instead, it will involve floating coalitions of countries... Some will help us publicly, while others... may help us privately and secretly. In this war, the mission [of the US] will define the coalition — not the other way around... Forget about 'exit strategies'; we're looking at a sustained engagement that carries no deadlines. We have no fixed rules about how to deploy our troops. But if this is a different kind of war, one thing is unchanged: America remains indomitable.¹⁵

MIRROR, MIRROR
ON THE WALL, WHO
IS THE MOST
FUNDAMENTAL
OF US ALL?



MIRROR, MIRROR
ON THE WALL, WHO
IS THE MOST
FUNDAMENTAL
OF US ALL?



¹ Bertolt Brecht "From a German War Primer" in Carolyn Forché, ed *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness* (Norton, 1993)

² Carolyn Forché "Ourselves or Nothing" *The Country Between Us* (Harper & Row, 1981)

³ Arundhati Roy "The Algebra of Infinite Justice" *The Guardian* September 28, 2001 (www.guardian.co.uk)

⁴ Chip Berlet and Margaret Quigley "Behind the Culture War to Restore Traditional Values" www.publiceye.org/magazine

⁵ Sara Diamond *Roads to Dominion: Right Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (Guilford Press, 1995). All references to Diamond are from this book unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Sara Diamond *op. cit.* 163.

⁷ The more militant wing of the anti-abortion movement split off into Operation Rescue, a shift from reform to resistance encouraged by electorally minded preachers (including Pat Robertson) endorsed and encouraged militant anti-abortionists. (Diamond, 230-231).

⁸ Diamond, 215, 237-238.

⁹ Arundhati Roy *ibid.*

¹⁰ Nawal el Saadawi "Islamic Fundamentalism and Women" *The Nawal el Saadawi Reader* (Zed Books, 1997), 95

¹¹ Arundhati Roy *ibid.*

¹² Frederick Clarkson "Christian Reconstructionism: Theocratic Dominionism Gains Influence" *Eyes Right*, 60

¹³ Nawal el Saadawi *op. cit.* 98

¹⁴ In Pakistan, also, the government promised 'an ambitious plan to cut state spending and reduce the number of government employees' for the IMF to release \$133 million. (from: "Debt Fears Hit Pakistan Rupee and Threaten Jobs," www.jubilee2000uk.org/finance/Debt_fears_pakistan.htm)

¹⁵ *New York Times* September 27

¹⁶ Julian Borger "US Inquiry Into Claims Black Voters Were Stripped of Rights" and "How

Six months later: reflections on the New Normal (3/14/2002)

Hours, if not minutes, after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the major news anchors announced, 'everything has changed', and the Bush administration used the opportunity to bring about a shift that some, only half-jokingly, refer to as a 'coup'. In retrospect, events since September 11 are the second phase — call it 'Coup 2' — of changes that began with the non-election in 2000 of George Bush to the Presidency that was 'Coup 1'. After recounts of disputed ballots in Florida, the Republican-controlled Supreme Court made Bush the winner by a partisan vote.¹⁶ The Bush team rapidly assembled Republican/corporate veterans in the wealthiest cabinet in US history. What was at stake were the obscene profits from the globalization of the economy, the New World Order that had just begun to emerge when Bush the Elder was voted out of office.

The disappeared surplus

The new Bush administration rapidly moved on this fiscal agenda with huge tax cuts. Bill Clinton, who had inherited a \$290 billion deficit in 1993, left a \$235 billion surplus in 2000, and the expectation of additional surpluses for years.¹⁷ But Bush II moved rapidly to institute a tax cut that left one-fifth of US citizens no better off and the top richest 1 per cent raking in 38 per cent of the savings.

By June 2001, states were predicting revenue losses of \$50-\$100 billion from the federal tax changes over the ten-year period.¹⁸ By the end of the summer, incredibly, the Clinton surplus was spent. The military budget would increase, and the General Accounting Office predicted that the government would have to 'borrow' \$9 billion from the Social Security trust fund set aside to pay for the rapidly aging 'baby boom.'

On September 11, *The New York Times* reported that support for Republicans was eroding.¹⁹ Bush refused to comment, flying to Florida to promote his education bill, only to be interrupted by his aides after the first jet crashed into the World Trade Center.

In the wake of the shock, fear, and rage that followed, the Republicans moved rapidly to put the country on a permanent military footing. In the 2002 budget, the Pentagon's share of the budget has been increased by 11.7% while most domestic programs were cut yet again.²⁰

Coup 2 – civil rights

'Coup 2', in the aftermath of September 11, is the deep erosion of civil rights and liberties in the name of 'homeland security' and the continuing militarization of the globe. The US Patriot Act, approved by majorities in both houses of Congress, allows deportation of immigrants whom the Secretary of State deems 'terrorist'. It allows the lock-up of 'aliens' indefinitely on mere suspicion without habeas corpus. Approximately 1,200 people were detained even before the Patriot Act, very few with demonstrable links to Al-Qaida. Ethnic profiling, or the targeting of Arabs, was used to question a further 5,000 immigrants. Now secret Immigration and Naturalization Service proceedings are closed even to family members. The Patriot Act authorizes wiretaps and secret searches in criminal investigations.

The administration has moved on both domestic and international fronts with unprecedented secrecy — including instituting a 'shadow government' immediately after the attacks but only recently made public.

The recession, rollbacks in Constitutional rights, and deepening social needs resulting from state and federal budget crises have escalated the task of progressive organizers, many of whom are also organizing against the War on Terrorism. Six months after 9*11, perusal of the week's news reveals this 'new normal' in the US as the 'old absurd' increased exponentially. The big story is the Israeli Army's invasion of the West Bank city of Ramallah and the largest refugee camp in the Gaza strip. Arab leaders in Jordan are urging that the US not go to war with Iraq, the next target in President (and oilman) Bush's 'axis of evil.' Jordan's King Abdullah II predicted that a US attack on Iraq could result in 'catastrophe for the region.'²¹ Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge clarifies exactly how frightened we are supposed to be (scared enough to let them do any damned thing). The current 'condition yellow' requires increased surveillance, coordinated emergency plans and tighter security. It will be years before we'll see condition green (low threat) again, because terrorism may be a 'permanent condition' in the US, we are informed.²¹

In newly liberated Afghanistan, 'Battle rages in cave complex' and 'Bin Laden is still alive,

alleged wife says.' In Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, 'Detainees persist in hunger strike'.²² *The New York Times* reports that Alleged President Bush 'will not allow ... a nation such as Iraq to threaten our very future by developing weapons of mass destruction' and the President's response to the recent leaking of a Pentagon document 'calling for the development of low-yield nuclear weapons that could be used against China, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Russia, Syria': which sounds like mass destruction to me. The current war against terror, he explains, 'is more akin to World War II than to Vietnam [because] ... we fight for the liberties and freedom of our country.'

Two pages later, we read: 'Marooned Taliban tick off the grim hours in an Afghan jail', where 3,000 men occupy 40 cells in a prison designed for 800, with reduced rations, a sanitation program of shoveling out human waste once a day, and, according to Physicians for Human Rights, an epidemic of dysentery and jaundice and food poisoning that has killed an unknown number of prisoners²³ — a consequence of the Bush administration's refusal to acknowledge the Geneva Convention for prisoners of its war in Afghanistan?

Domestically, the Democrats are at least criticizing Bush's proposal for welfare reform, which requires 70 per cent caseload reduction by 2007. There will be no extra money for child care, but the administration will spend money encouraging poor women in single-headed households to get married.

This is the threshold of the twenty-first century, which we are on the verge of making even bloodier than the twentieth. Carolyn Forché, fresh from the wounded ground of El Salvador's civil war, got it right: It is either the beginning or the end/Of the world, and the choice is ourselves/ Or nothing. It is time, again, to go after all that is lost, to shape a post-modernity in which humaneness and justice and democracy are more than ironic doublespeak.

If there were not already a transnational feminist analysis and movement, it would be necessary to invent one. As feminists fighting fundamentalisms — including the fundamental worship of profit under neo-liberalism —

- It is time to say to the multinationals: Share the profits of 'modernity' with all the communities and the continents that capitalism has sucked dry.
- It is time to say to the patriarchs: Women will shape a humane future beyond your control.
- It is time to say to the homophobes: There are many ways to love, and we will use them all, driven by a deep desire for justice and relationship.
- It is time to say to the racists: We are finally dismantling the legacies of slavery and colonialism, and together we will repair the damage that was done.
- It is time to say to all the warmongers: You cannot have this century. Stand down. □

Florida Played the Race Card: 700,000 People With Criminal Past Banned From Voting in Pivotal State" *The Guardian*, December 4, 2000; Nathan Newman "The Jim Crow Five and the Coming Political War" December 13, 2000. From BRC-news@list.ta.ca

¹⁷ Allison Mitchell "Democrats Assail Bush on Economy" *The New York Times*, January 5, 2002

¹⁸ Kevin Sack "States Expecting to lose Billions From Repeal of U.S. Estate Tax" *The New York Times* National Desk, June 21, 2001

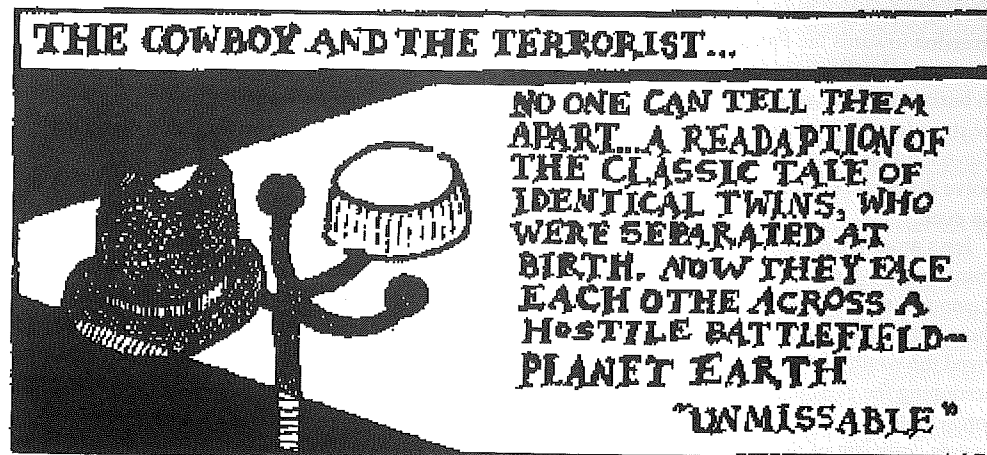
¹⁹ Alison Mitchell and Richard W. Stevenson "Key Leaders talk of Possible Deals to Revive Economy" *The New York Times* Sept. 11, 2001

²⁰ Richard Stevenson "The President's Budget Proposal: The Overview; President Submits \$2 Trillion Budget That Raises Deficit" *The New York Times* Feb 5, 2002

²¹ "Jordan tells Cheney to avoid war on Iraq" *Raleigh News and Observer* March 13, 2002

²² "Detainees Persist in Hunger Strike" *News and Observer* March 13, 2002

²³ "Marooned Taliban Tick Off the Grim hours in an Afghan Jail" *The New York Times* March 14, 2002



Israel: the other stories

Recent months have seen an appalling escalation in the conflict in the Middle East. Helen Lowe, a secular anti-Zionist Jew, looks behind the headlines to analyse the power of the religious right in Israel, and its consequences for Israeli women as well as for the Palestinian people.

For a moment after September 11 there was much talk about realignment, and it seemed that Bush might just pull the rug from under Israel's aggression towards the Palestinians. Then it passed, and this fleeting opportunity was turned into business-much-worse-than-usual, revealing a new stage in a long crisis. For those of us who believe in other ways for peoples and nations to resolve differences, there appears to be less space than ever.

Jews around the world live in societies where racism and anti-Semitism are endemic, and we are accustomed to struggling alongside other minority groups for human rights for all. Many have braved the wrath of their own communities, by questioning the expansionist policies of the Zionist state. For people with Christian backgrounds, criticism of these policies is often

silenced by negative emotions associated with the Holocaust. But for fundamentalist Christians, especially in the US, reassurance comes from evangelical leaders, who preach that only the revival of the people of Israel in its (greater) land can bring about Christian redemption. This element in the Republican party has a growing influence on George W Bush. For Jews and Christians, a sanitised view of the Jewish state is prevalent, and Israel is promoted as the 'only democracy in the region' by factions who see support for Israeli expansionism as an essential component in the US response to the attacks of September 11.

It was not so long ago that huge crowds came out in Israel in support of 'Peace Now', and the Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, seemed to be listening. Then, in 1995, in the middle of a speech

to a peace rally, Rabin was murdered by a Jewish religious fanatic. Since then, peace has been a vanishing prospect, and we are now in a situation where Jews write numbers on the arms of prisoners, build walls with locked gates round Arab villages and deny human rights to many thousands of people — so many acts that are so resonant of a terrible time in Jewish history.

Religious and secular rightwing parties have enjoyed a recent upsurge in support, with increased representation in the Knesset (parliament) and in government coalitions. Contributing to this popularity has been disappointment with 30 years of Labour governments, the romanticisation of the 'pioneering' settlement movement in the Occupied Territories, and an increasing interest in religion. There was also, especially after Rabin's assassination, the perception that the security crisis could not be solved by negotiation (a view promoted by successive governments dominated by ex-generals).

It has also become increasingly acceptable for Israeli leaders to talk about the 'transfer' (removal or ethnic cleansing) of Palestinians from Israel; this has been on the agenda since at least 1948, and now there is increasing support for the transfer of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. Parties that promote these policies are expected to make gains in the next general election.

With the Israeli government claiming increased legitimacy from the attacks of September 11 and stepping up incursions into Palestinian areas, I wanted to explore some of the trends in Israeli society and the government's actions in the Occupied Territories, which I see as amounting to years of provocation of the Palestinian population. This article is essentially a broad outline informed by *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* and English-language Israeli media such as the *Jerusalem Post* and *Ha'aretz*. I discovered much not only about the make-up of Zionist expansionist politics, but also about the context in which many issues that affect human rights and women's status are determined. Regardless of stated aims in the Declaration of Independence regarding equality for (Jewish) men and women and other modern notions of democracy, archaic religious practices have had an extremely strong influence in deciding women's position. In the Knesset, the secular rightwing currently holds the largest number of seats, but religious extremists are well represented and can sometimes win votes for policies

that promote ancient patriarchal religious laws. Their influence in settler politics in the Occupied Territories is immense.

A military culture

State-of-emergency legislation has been in effect since the establishment of Israel in 1948. This gives the army considerable powers and has led to extensive human rights abuse against Palestinians.

Military service is an important determining factor for people's status in Israeli society, and so many generals move from the army to politics that the government could be said to be run by the military. The fate of conscientious objectors depends on the politics of the conscience — ultra-orthodox students at yeshivas (religious colleges) are exempted from compulsory service, but political 'refuseniks' have been prosecuted and imprisoned.

Although yeshiva study exempts young men from army service, increasing numbers are joining Hesder yeshivas, where service is combined with religious study. Keen to prove themselves in a macho military culture, they have demanded and won the right to serve in elite combat units, while at the same time insisting on segregation from women soldiers.

Some welfare benefits are available only to families with at least one member who has completed army service, and this has long disadvantaged the Palestinian and ultra-orthodox Jewish minorities. Professional success can depend on an individual's service record; until recently women could not serve in combat units, one reason frequently cited for their lack of promotion in civilian life. Feminist campaigners have had to take care to dissociate themselves from endorsing the role of the army by demanding the demilitarisation of Israeli society at the same time as equality of opportunity.

Law, religion and personal life

Although Israel is a secular society, and most Israelis live entirely secular lives, the religious rightwing has a disproportionate political influence. No single party in the Knesset has a clear majority but, in proportional representation, relatively small parties can get members elected, and religious parties can wield considerable power in coalition groupings formed on the principle that votes for government policy can be 'bought' by giving cabinet seats to minority party leaders. But even rightwing governments sometimes have to pay attention to the opinions

of liberal-minded Jews both inside and outside Israel.

There is a considerable strain between the orthodox establishment and civil law, with the High Court often providing the veneer for Israel's claim to the human rights provisions that are expected of a democracy. The civil courts have prevailed on many important issues, and religious parties often complain that it is undemocratic for the High Court, which is not an elected body, to rule against parliamentary decisions.

In the early days of the Jewish state, the orthodox establishment acquired considerable powers in the governance of the country, touching many aspects of people's lives, whether they are religious or not. Religious councils have power over government budgets for religious affairs in local communities. In 1987, Lea Shakkdiel was elected as a member of one of these councils. The Minister of Religious Affairs refused to confirm the election because she was a woman. The following year, the High Court ruled that her election was legal and binding. When defeated by the law, religious leaders frequently resort to sabotage by various methods, including psychological intimidation: it was three years before she could be seated.

There have been bitter disputes between orthodox, non-orthodox and secular Jews, ostensibly about 'who is a Jew' but really about who decides who is a Jew. It is followers of ancient Jewish law who determine Jewishness, with profound implications for the citizenship status of hundreds of thousands of people. This is particularly so for recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union, many of whom are not accepted as Jews and their children are therefore denied full rights of citizenship.

Exclusive legal powers in many personal matters are vested in religious leaders. Jews, Christians and Arabs are all expected to deal with their respective religious courts over such issues as marriage and divorce, with serious implications for women. Jews elsewhere have more choice in these matters than Jews in Israel. For example, marriage in Israel has to be by religious ceremony. The state recognises civil marriage but the couple has to marry elsewhere — there's a thriving trade in secular and mixed marriage tourism to Cyprus, for example. Civil divorce is available and, in the case of Jewish marriages, there is often a race — the husband running to the religious and the wife to the civil courts. Under Jewish law, a woman is not divorced

unless she has been granted a *get* (a formal statement of divorce) by her husband. He can, and often does, refuse — out of malice and/or reluctance to pay maintenance, divide the property or allow custody or visitation rights over the children. Many women are forced to waive their rights, and are encouraged to do so by the rabbinical courts, which are well known for favouring the husband's point of view.

In recent years, feminist and gay rights campaigners have made many gains in the area of equal rights and the protection of women and children, but the ultra-orthodox establishment often fights a rearguard action. They see the use of such legislation by anyone from the religious community as a terrible betrayal. In July 2000, the *Jerusalem Post* reported on a case in which two sisters were sexually abused for years by their ultra-orthodox father, and the local rabbis ordered that mother and daughters be ostracised when the mother told the police. Posters condemning them as slanderers went up on the walls near the home, and the girls were expelled from school.

Similar conflicts are seen in other matters, such as gay rights and abortion rights. Abortion is legal in Israel when the life or health of the woman is at risk. In 1980, a 'social clause' permitting abortion in cases of social or economic distress was removed after pressure from ultra-orthodox parties. Rich women can go to private clinics for *illegal* abortions, which are never prosecuted, while poor women have to convince a hospital committee that the operation is necessary. Last year the anti-abortion group Efrat distributed a video to over 350,000 households. The video, purporting to show a fetus struggling during an abortion, was shown at a special session of the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that Efrat supporters yelled insults at female MPs. The Health Minister disassociated himself from the video but said the ministry would give women who wanted abortions information about the risks involved.

A gay rights law bans aspects of anti-gay discrimination and there is an equal age of consent (16 years). Gay men and lesbians can serve in the army, although an edition of the army's weekly newspaper was withdrawn when it featured a front-page article by an openly gay officer. Orthodox Jews consider homosexuality to be a sin; religious politicians do not hesitate to use strong terms: 'Homosexuality is an abomina-

tion...' said the deputy health minister (*Jerusalem Post*, July 23, 1998). When one rabbi stated in the Knesset that homosexuals should be executed, many gay activists and gay-friendly MPs received death threats. In some orthodox enclaves, the authorities organise 'modesty patrols', who have been known to turn violent, and whose remit includes harassing homosexuals.

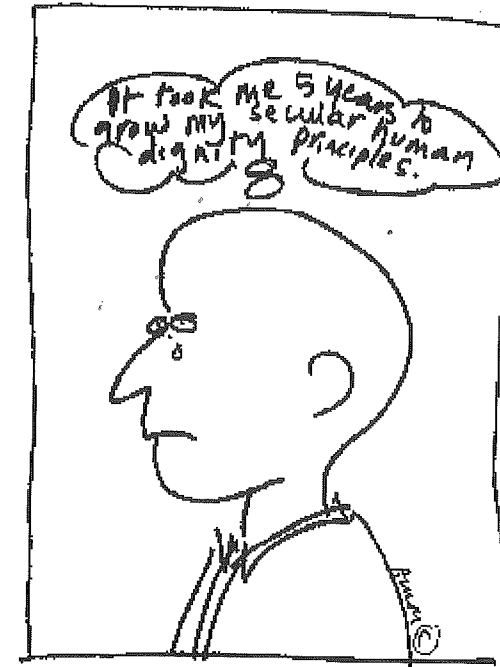
The patrols are out for women, too. Suzanne Goldenberg, reported in *The Guardian* that ultra-orthodox Jews often lead a life 'so self-contained as to be almost hermetically sealed', living in tight communities and sending their children to religious schools. Television is banned, though Internet use is allowed under rabbinical supervision. The dress code imposes ankle-length skirts, thick tights and long sleeves on women, who must also cover their hair. Wall posters in some Jerusalem neighbourhoods ordered mannequins to be covered in clothing shops, and exhorted women to boycott shops that didn't comply. Women employed at the education ministry, which borders a haredi (ultra-orthodox) neighbourhood, have been spat at and had insults, soiled nappies and rubbish hurled at them when they turn up for work in sleeveless tops.

Orthodox Jews have also frequently attacked Jews from more liberal religious groupings. For instance, although the Supreme Court has lifted a religious ban on women wearing prayer shawls at the Western 'Wailing' Wall in Jerusalem, Orthodox parties are trying to force through a law that would make this an imprisonable offence, and women asserting their right to pray there have needed police protection from physical attack by orthodox vigilantes.

The ultra-orthodox establishment has also tried to influence the nature of some public bus services. Last year, they won a campaign on one route for segregated seats and bus stops: men at the front, women at the rear. For some years, women passengers on several private bus routes serving religious communities have been directed to sit at the back, with some buses featuring curtain partitions.

Immigration, labour and prostitution

Issues of citizenship, human rights and the status of women are interwoven with immigration and labour policies that are effectively determined by the Zionist agenda, often justified in the name of security. Israeli governments have always encouraged Jewish immigration, often from specific areas, such as Yemen and North Africa in



Secular Israelis with beards petitioned the High Court to receive special gas masks that had been distributed only to religious Jews. In an emergency, the army told them, the secular should shave their beards. The latter were outraged, and invoked the concept of human dignity. Justice Tvi Tal, a religious man, felt that the petitioner would have been better off 'had he avoided turning the care of his beard into a principle founded on human dignity'.

the 1950s. Recent years have seen large waves of immigration from the former Soviet Union (FSU) and the United States. Many orthodox Jews from the US have settled in the West Bank. Although only a small percentage of the population, their political influence has far outweighed their numerical presence. Sharon has repeatedly stated his intention to bring in one million new Jewish immigrants, and Israel is currently targeting South Africa, France and Argentina, where there is economic or political insecurity.

However, Israel has always had a problem filling jobs at the bottom end of the labour market, such as construction and agriculture. Much of this work was done by Palestinians coming into Israel from the Occupied Territories but, as a result of the closing off of the Territories by Israel, they have now been replaced by migrant labour from other countries — up to 250,000 foreign workers have come to Israel from around 70 different countries. This systematic exclusion of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories has been underway for about ten years, but the Intifada of October 2000 led to even more severe restrictions, with a complete ban on Palestinian entry from Gaza and much of the West Bank leading to a tripling of unemployment in those areas to nearly 30%. Migrant workers now comprise approximately 13 per cent of the labour force in Israel; 30,000 permit

holders work in domestic jobs, including many women from the Philippines who live-in as nannies or carers.

As in many other countries, legal 'guest worker' status depends on possession of a work permit; in Israel, the permit ties each worker to a particular employer. To leave that job for any reason means being immediately redefined as 'illegal' and subjected to stringent immigration laws — a system that has been referred to by some judges in Israel as 'modern slavery' (quoted in *Ha'Aretz* in January, 2002).

In January this year, as part of its strategy for solving rising unemployment, the government announced measures to remove foreign workers. It is estimated that around half of all foreign workers in Israel have no legal status. Illegal workers were to be deported and their employers fined and jailed, although many have lived in Israel for several years, have children in school, have learned to speak Hebrew and have built friendship networks and communities. Meanwhile, hundreds of Israeli farmers protested against the deportations and demanded extra permits for foreign workers. Israelis, they said, are unwilling to do farming. Farmers' banners

read: 'Better Thai Workers than Palestinians'. The government then agreed to bring in 6,000 Thai agricultural workers to meet these demands.

Prostitution in Israel is also intricately linked with the country's immigration laws. According to Israel's Hotline for Migrant Workers, 2,000-3,000 women are smuggled into the country each year for purposes of prostitution. The majority come from the FSU. Many believe they are coming to work as waitresses or au pairs, but even those who know what their work will be are unprepared for the conditions they find. Many suffer beatings and repeated rapes, and many are stripped and put on show at pimping auctions. Tel Aviv's Hotline for Migrant Workers has alleged police complicity in trafficking. Although Israeli government sources like to refer to the large number of foreign workers as the majority source of brothel income, the clients include secular and orthodox soldiers and businessmen. In December 2001, preliminary readings of two bills passed in the Knesset — one aimed at giving prostitutes the right to public legal aid, and another giving a mandatory four-year minimum sentence for 'white slavers' who trade in women. However, as is common everywhere in the

world, women refuse to complain, or withdraw complaints, through fear of reprisals, and this is often compounded by their illegal status.

It is impossible to separate the issues of Jewish immigration, migrant labour and the status of Palestinians, both inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories. With Palestinians barred from entering Israel to work, migrant workers are brought in, putting an even greater squeeze on the economic life of Palestinian communities.

Settlements and occupation

The Six-Day War in 1967 was a watershed in Israeli politics. It resulted in Israeli occupation of parts of Jordan, Syria and Egypt — including the 'Occupied Territories' of the West Bank and Gaza strip. On Passover in 1968, a small illegal Jewish presence was established in the Park Hotel in Hebron in the West Bank (this made the Park Hotel in Netanya a symbolic choice for the suicide bomb at Passover this year). This incursion laid early foundations for the settlement

movement that mushroomed after 1974. From the beginning, the legality of the settlements was challenged in the courts and in the Knesset. Justifications, in the name of God and security, drew on a comprehensive range of imagery, demonising the Palestinian inhabitants and giving a mystical religious slant to what was essentially a land-grab.

While the settlement movement seems to be dominated by messianic religious-Zionist factions, it actually incorporates the spectrum from ultra-orthodox to secular. What they share is ultra-nationalist right-wing politics. For secular right-wingers, Zionism has acquired many of the characteristics of fundamentalism. The settlements are their life — they are prepared to defend them against any argument of logic or justice and to use any means that come to hand to defend the appropriated lands with force. Settlement in the Occupied Territories is an extremely controversial issue among Israelis. Many believe that the settlers — now more than 300,000 — have been encouraged with subsidies, grants and investment in a deliberate attempt to effect a permanent annexation of these lands in order to extend Israel's borders, and that there never has been a genuine intention on the part of any Israeli government to negotiate a peace that would involve relinquishing control over those territories. The presence of people with intransigent right-wing nationalist and religious views has led to daily confrontations with Palestinians, and even occasionally to confrontations between settlers and Israeli soldiers when the settlers have tried to take 'security' measures into their own hands.

With the expansion of settlements, the building of roads through Palestinian areas, and the barring of Palestinians from coming into Israel to work, there is now the extra imposition of draconian travel restrictions on Palestinians within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. What is now being destroyed is not the 'infrastructure of terrorism', but the entire economic and physical infrastructure of Palestinian towns and villages.

Barriers aren't used only to keep Palestinians out — they are also used to keep them in their villages:

locked behind iron gates and steel chains, with metal locks... On the main road, IDF soldiers stood and stopped those trying to sneak out... Samia Radi, an old woman who had suffered a serious stroke, was loaded into

the trunk of the village taxi, and transported like an animal, because ambulances are not allowed to enter... the Palestinians live humiliated in their prison, their roads open only to Jews, their sick and their expectant mothers doomed to suffering, their children to a long and arduous journey to school and their elderly to trudging through the mud. (*Ha'Aretz* April 3, 2002)

Well-serviced Jewish settlements are now built next to increasingly impoverished Palestinian towns and villages. The whole policy of settlement building was designed to ensure future control over land and water resources and lead to the extension of the border to include the 'greater Israel' of the expansionists' dreams.

Just solutions: women working together

Jewish and Palestinian women have been active in peace campaigns in Israel, making connections between gender politics and the struggle for human rights. In January 2002, Lucy Nusseibeh, head of Middle East Non-violence and Democracy in Jerusalem, wrote:

the context for Palestinians today is one of total despair. There is a closure of minds and futures as well as roads, the economy is in almost total collapse. There is hope that women working together can bring about the viable Palestinian state and just solution that has so far eluded men.

The State of Israel depends on the support of Jews around the world, many of whom are identifying Israel's 'security' measures as an aggressive expansionism that will perpetuate militarism and terrorist attacks for generations to come. There is a courageous Israeli opposition, with 'refuseniks' and members of the peace movement defying government policies to show solidarity with besieged Palestinians. Every move the government intensifies hatred and bitterness, and some Palestinian factions seem prepared to exploit that, often apparently endorsing the security argument. Jews everywhere must refuse to be silenced by their own communities, and make a concerted effort to insist on changes in Israeli policy, to defy the forces that want a final solution to the Palestinian problem and to help rebuild Palestinian communities. □

I would like to thank Tirza Waisel and Adah Kay of Jews for Justice for Palestinians for reading the first draft of this article and offering extremely helpful comments. The opinions expressed in the article are entirely my own.



In the Yishuv period (Jewish community in Palestine before the state of Israel established), religious groups demanded the exclusion of women from the list of voters because, the argument ran, women have no role to play in public affairs. So furious was the debate that some groups boycotted the elections of Yishuv institutions because of the rules on women's suffrage in the election. Others permitted only males to vote and then had the weight of the male vote doubled in order to compensate for the lack of women's votes.

Useful websites:

Jews for Justice For Palestinians www.jjffp.org;

Israeli feminist and anti-militarist politics are examined by the New Profile movement (www.newprofile.org/english/)

The Israel Religious Action Centre website has news and views criticising the Orthodox right and promoting a secular state (www.iraac.org).

Kav La'Oved, a workers' rights organisation, represents migrant workers and campaigns on their behalf. It also reports on issues arising from trafficking and prostitution (www.kavlaoved.org.il).

The *Ha'Aretz* website has excellent in-depth features on the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory

Open letter by Rape Crisis Federation, Wales and England

The other war against terror

Rhetoric has overtaken logic and dissent against the war has been construed as support for terror. The Rape Crisis Federation rejects this simplistic analysis; we set the welfare of women above such considerations. We want to extend our experience in dealing with terror to those involved in this war against terror.

Many critics will say that women in the West are well off compared to women elsewhere, but we have to declare our shared existence on the continuum of human rights abuses which men deny. Fine phrases about freedom are for male consumption whilst women are afraid to walk the streets at night, and are equally afraid in their own homes; either alone or with an abuser. Our task is to challenge the silence that makes invisible the women who suffer from male violence — women in the West and in Afghanistan. It is the task of governments to acknowledge the position of all people affected by violence and to look for viable solutions.

We object that the only role given to women is that of victim. Women need a political voice and men need to listen. But it seems we are playing a man's game with man's rules. Whose definition of terror is being used, whose justice is at stake? For many women 'normal life' means

terror and violence. Rape is always used as a systematic tool of war, and as a tool for terror on the domestic level at times of 'peace'.

Governments should be accountable for the terror that women experience. But few international laws help to ensure that they are. The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984) does not exclude women but, in practice, women have been overwhelmingly excluded. Terror and torture are highly sexualised forms of violence and the brutalities learned through the abuse of women are also used against men. Rape and the threat of rape remain the forms of terror most predominantly perpetrated against women. However, in a landmark ruling from the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal in the Hague in February 2001, mass rape and sexual enslavement in time of war was for the first time regarded as a crime against humanity.

Whilst the international community was quick to respond to the events of September 11th, the position of women was seen, if at all, as little more than pawns in the political game. The war on terror is not a form of justice that is constructed around respect for women. What kind of victory can be gained from such justice? □

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Surviving the sanctions: Women's lives in Iraq

Before the sanctions, says Nadjé Al Ali, Iraqi women were among the most educated and professional in the whole region, although, at the same time, they were also among the most oppressed. In discussing the impact of sanctions, she goes beyond the immediate effects of widespread poverty and severe shortages of food and medicine, and looks at the long-lasting implications for the social and cultural life of Iraqi society, and especially the profound transformation in the position of women.

The 1970s and early 1980s were years of general economic boom in Iraq and a broad middle class emerged and expanded. The initial period after the nationalisation of the Iraqi oil industry in 1972 was characterised by economic hardship. However, the oil embargo by OPEC countries of 1973, known as the 'oil crisis', was followed by a period of boom and expansion. Oil prices shot up and oil-producing countries became aware of their bargaining power. Although signs of deterioration of living standards started to become evident during the years of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), there seemed to be a prevailing belief that the situation would improve again once the war stopped.

In the context of this rapid economic expansion, labour was scarce, and the Iraqi government actively sought to incorporate women into the labour force. Subsequently, working outside the home became not only acceptable for women but prestigious. In 1974, a

government decree stipulated that all university graduates — men and women — would be employed automatically. In certain professions, such as health-care and teaching, education itself entailed a government contract that obliged students to take up a job in their respective professions. Policies encouraging women to enter the work force cannot be explained in terms of egalitarian or even feminist principles, although several women did positively comment on the early Ba'thists' policies of women's social inclusion. The Iraqi Ba'th party, in power since 1968, was originally based on the secular ideology of Arab nationalism and socialism. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the ideology of the Ba'thist regime in terms of women's roles and positions. Whatever the government's motivations, Iraqi women came to be among the most educated and professional in the whole region, although, at the same time, they were among the most oppressed. No independent

This is an edited version of two papers by Nadjé Al Ali of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK posted on the Internet website 'Act Together: Women Against Sanctions On Iraq', a group of UK-based Iraqi and non-Iraqi women whose aim is to encourage people in Britain to question their government's policy.

A chronology of key events:

1920 Iraq placed under British mandate.

1932 Iraq becomes an independent state.

1958 Monarchy overthrown in military coup.

1968 Coup led by Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party (ASBP)

1972 15-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between Iraq and the Soviet Union.

1972 Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) nationalised.

1979 President Al-Bakr resigns, succeeded by Vice-President Saddam Hussein.

Iran-Iraq war

1980 4 September Iran shells Iraqi border towns.

1980 22 September Iraq attacks Iranian air bases.

1980 23 September Iran bombs Iraqi military and economic targets.

1988 Ceasefire comes into effect to be monitored by the UN Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG).

Gulf War

1990 August 2 Iraq invades Kuwait; is condemned by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 660 which calls for full withdrawal.

1990 August 6 UNSC Resolution 661 imposes economic sanctions.

1990 November UNSC Resolution 678 authorizes states co-operating with Kuwait to use 'all necessary means' to uphold UNSC Resolution 660.

1991 January Coalition forces begin aerial bombing ("Operation Desert Storm").

1991 February US planes destroy air-raid shelter in Baghdad, killing over 300 people.

1991 March Iraq accepts ceasefire terms.

1991 March/April Iraq suppresses rebellions in south and north of the country.

political activism has been tolerated under the regime of President Saddam Hussein, which has prevented any form of women's movement or feminist organisations to emerge. The General Federation of Iraqi Women is part of the Ba'ath regime and strictly follows its rulings and prescriptions. And these have changed radically ever since the imposition of economic sanctions.

Poverty and insecurity

There are great differences between women from different backgrounds. As well as differences based on rural and urban circumstances, religious affiliation (Sunni, Shi'a or Christian), or ethnic group (Arab or Kurd), there are huge differences related to social class. For women on low incomes, survival has become the main aim in life. It is their children in particular who are more likely to suffer from disease and malnutrition or to become statistics in the exceptionally high child mortality rates. Yet even for educated women of the previously well-off middle-classes, feeding their children has become the major worry and focus.

Hana', who has recently left Iraq and now lives in London recalls:

I would feed my children and my husband before eating anything myself. Often I would stay hungry. I would also feed my children before visiting anyone. Before the sanctions people were very generous. You would always serve tea and biscuits if not a meal when a visitor came. Now people have stopped visiting so that they do not embarrass each other.

Education and working conditions have deteriorated rapidly. Higher education has virtually collapsed. Monthly salaries in the public sector, which is increasingly staffed by women, have dropped dramatically and do not correspond to high inflation rates. Many have felt compelled to continue working because their monthly food rations were tied to their jobs. An educated middle-class woman in her late 40s, let's call her Wadat, had worked as a teacher in a high school until 1995. She told me:

We did not feel it so much during the first years of the sanctions, but it really hit us by 1994. Social conditions had deteriorated; the currency had been devalued while salaries were fixed. Many women started to quit work. Some of my friends could not even afford transportation to the school. Before the sanctions, the school made sure that we were picked up by a bus, but all this was cut. For me, the most important reason was my children. I did not want them to come home and be alone in the house. It has become too

unsafe. And then, I know from my own work that schools have become so bad, because teachers have quit and there is no money for anything. So I felt that I have to teach them at home.

State funding had provided numerous nurseries and kindergartens, free public transportation to and from school as well as to the work place. Another support system for women like Wadat was based on extended family ties and neighbourly relations. These days women are reluctant to leave their children with neighbours or other relatives because of the general sense of insecurity.

The cultural cost of sanctions

The demographic cost of two wars and forced male economic migration triggered by the imposition of sanctions account for the high number of female-headed households. And while many families lost sons, brothers, fathers, friends and neighbours during this time, life in the cities appeared relatively 'normal', with women notably playing a very significant role in public life.

It is not only war widows who find themselves without husbands but also women whose husbands went abroad to escape the bleak conditions and find ways to support their families. And some men have abandoned their wives and children, being unable to cope with their inability to be the breadwinner. Divorce rates have increased (about 25 per cent of Iraqi refugees in the UK are either separated or divorced) but probably more noteworthy in a society which used to value marriage and family life greatly, there has been a decrease in the number of marriages. The acute demographic imbalance also explains why polygamy, which had become largely restricted to rural areas or uneducated people, has been on the increase in recent years.

Another common phenomenon is what one Iraqi woman called 'marrying below one's class'. Iraq has traditionally been a very class-oriented society where one's family name and background might open up or close many doors. Now one can detect greater social mobility and less rigid class barriers. This is partly due to demographic changes with respect to men and women, but it also relates to a radical inversion of class structures. The impoverishment of the previously well-off middle classes goes side by side with an emergence of a nouveau riche class of war and sanctions profiteers. As in any tragedy,

some people make money out of sanctions, especially those involved in black-market trading.

At the same time as it has become more difficult to find a husband, young women in particular feel pressured by a new 'cultural' environment which is marked by a decline in moral values such as honesty, generosity and sociability and an increased public religiosity and conservatism. Many women I interviewed concurred with my relatives in Baghdad when they spoke sadly about the total inversion of cultural codes and moral values. I will never forget when one of my aunts told me:

You know, bridges and houses can easily be re-built. It will take time, but it is possible. But what they have really destroyed is our morale, or values.

She, like many other Iraqi women I talked to, sadly stated that honesty was not paying off any more. People have become corrupt and greedy. Trust has become very rare word and envy even exists among closest kin.

Crime rates are also on the increase. Many women reported that 10 years ago they used to keep all their doors open and felt totally secure. Now there are numerous accounts of burglaries — often involving violence. Also, several women told me that their children have become much more needy and clinging as a result of the Gulf War and the continuous threat of bombing. In the absence of counselling and therapy, mothers carry the burden of dealing with their traumatised children. There is also a general sense of distrust except within the closed nuclear family. This starkly contrasts with traditional cultural values, which put a great emphasis on extended families' relationships.

Religion and superstition

In the midst of the economic hardships and political repression, and the destruction of moral values and cultural codes, more and more women (and men) have turned towards religion to find some sort of comfort. Even Manal Younes, the President of the Federation of Iraqi Women affiliated with the Ba'ath party and the regime, is now veiled and ostentatiously pious. The most obvious signs are revealed in women's dress codes: the *hijab* — until several years ago rarely seen on the streets of Iraq — is now widespread even amongst young schoolgirls.

The apparent increase in religiosity became very obvious to me during my last trip in 1997 to Baghdad. None of my aunts or cousins had ever worn the *hijab* and religion was never a big issue

within the family. But now all of my aunts pray regularly, wear the *hijab* and frequently mention religion and God in their discourses. I personally do not put any value judgement on increased religiosity, in and of itself. Yet, in the Iraqi context, similar to Islamisation processes in other countries in the Middle East, the turn towards religion is coupled with an increased conservatism and social restrictions which target women specifically. (And it has to be stressed that also among the Christian minority that still exists in Iraq, people have become more religious and conservative.) So there has not only been a growing trend towards religiosity by women, but women have also been subjected to increasing social pressures expecting and demanding the expression of religious adherence. For women this often culminates in the question of whether to wear the *hijab* or not — the *hijab* is not merely an expression of increased religiosity, but also the most visible and obvious sign of religious adherence and supposedly good moral conduct.

Two refugee women in London added another dimension to the complex phenomenon of apparent increase in religiosity when they told me that they only put up the *hijab* to cover up their hair. Khadija said:

I did not have the money any more to dye my hair. Even henna was too expensive. And it was also difficult to afford a haircut. My sister did it, and she did a lousy job. I put on the *hijab* to cover up my awful hair.

According to Khadija, there are many women who are more motivated by embarrassment and the sense of shame in terms of their looks rather than religious reasons.

As well as growing religiosity, increasing numbers are turning to superstition and the spiritual realms. Spirit possession and exorcism (*zar*) existed previously in certain rural areas among uneducated people. But now more and more women are rekindling old traditions and beliefs and turning to healers, exorcists and witchcraft to deal with their physical and emotional problems. One Iraqi woman who is working with recently-arrived refugees expressed her shock and disbelief to me. Until a few years ago she had never heard of the array of stories and beliefs that related to spirits and witchcraft.

Violence against women

There has been a great increase in the numbers of women turning to prostitution to survive. A new law preventing women younger than 45 from leaving the country unless accompanied by a

1991 April UN safe-haven in northern Iraq for protection of Kurds is approved at a European Union meeting in Luxembourg. USA orders Iraq to end all military activity in this area.

1992 August No-fly zone for Iraqi planes is established in southern Iraq.

1993 June US cruise-missile attack on Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Baghdad in retaliation for attempted assassination of US President, George Bush, in Kuwait in April.

1994 November Iraqi National Assembly recognizes Kuwait's borders.

Oil-for-food programme

1995 April UNSC Resolution 986 allows partial resumption of Iraq's oil exports to buy food and medicine ('oil-for-food' programme). Not accepted by Iraq until May and not implemented until December 1996.

1995 October Saddam Hussein wins referendum to remain president for another 7 years.

1996 August Iraq launches offensive into northern no-fly zone.

1998 October Iraq ends all forms of co-operation with UN Special Commission to Oversee the Destruction of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (Unscm).

Operation Desert Fox

1998 December UN staff evacuated from Baghdad and USA/UK launch bombing campaign, 'Operation Desert Fox' to destroy Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes.

1999 December UNSC Resolution 1284 creates UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (Unmovic) to replace Unscm. Iraq rejects the resolution.

2000 August Reopening of Baghdad airport, followed by international flights organised by countries and organisations to campaign against sanctions.

2000 October Iraq resumes domestic passenger flights. Commercial air links re-established with Russia, Ireland and Middle East.

2000 November New weapons inspection proposals rejected.

2000 December Iraq temporarily halts oil exports after the UN rejects its request that buyers pay a 50-cent-a-barrel surcharge into an Iraqi bank account not controlled by the UN.

2001 Free-trade-zone agreements set up with neighbouring countries. Rail link with Turkey re-opened.

2001 February UK/US bombing raids against Iraq's air defence network have little international support.

2002 January Iraq invites a UN human rights expert to visit for the first time since envoys were banned from the country in 1992.

2002 May UN Security Council agrees to overhaul the sanctions regime, unanimously voting to replace a blanket ban on a whole range of goods with 'smart' sanctions specifically targeted at military and dual-use equipment.

male first-of-kin (the *mahram* escort) was enacted after the Jordanian government complained about widespread prostitution by Iraqi women in Amman.

A general sense of frustration and desperation amongst both men and women has led to more frequent incidents of domestic violence. A few women stated that their husbands have become more violent and abusive since the sanctions. Widespread despair and frustration and the perceived shame of not being able to provide for the family evokes not only depression but also anger. Women are often at the receiving end of men's frustrations.

Increased restrictions on women's movements and behaviour linked with a constant concern with women's honour is maybe more significant than the widespread veiling. The most horrendous aspect of these mounting pressures is the rise in so-called 'honour killings', which have been frequent during the past years and have been legalised. Women who are suspected of sexual misconduct are killed by their husbands, brothers or fathers to save the 'honour' of the family.

Family planning has become a big source of conflict between husbands and wives. Before the Iran-Iraq war, all kinds of contraception were available and legal. Then contraception was made illegal as the government tried to encourage Iraqi women to 'produce' a great number of future citizens to make up for the loss of life during the war. Many incentives were given, such as the extension of maternity leave to a year, of which six months were paid. Baby food and articles were imported and subsidised.

Contraceptives are still not available, but women's attitudes have changed because of the material circumstances and the moral climate and they are now reluctant to have many children. Abortions are illegal, and many women risk their health and their lives to have back-alley abortions.

The director of an orphanage in Baghdad told me two years ago that they are facing a new phenomenon in Iraq, with new-born babies being left on the street, often by married women who cannot face being unable to feed their children.

However, some women told me that their relationships to their husbands had improved since sanctions. Aliya, a housewife in her late 30s, said:

My husband never did anything in the house before the sanctions. He used to work in a factory outside of Baghdad. Now that he stopped working, he helps me to bake bread and to take care of the children. We get along much better than before because he started to realise that I am working very hard in the house.

A brighter note

The bleak picture sketched here only touches on some aspects of the numerous ways in which sanctions have affected women. I am not suggesting that sanctions constitute the only negative forces impacting on women's lives. But I have tried to point to social and cultural phenomena which have emerged during the past years and which have to be viewed as triggered by the sanctions.

Let me finish on a slightly brighter note. Iraqi women are not simply victims of the Iraqi regime, patriarchal values, and sanctions policies. There might not be independent women's organisations fighting for equality and social justice, but there are certainly women who refuse to give up their dignity and are determined to survive. I am referring to ordinary women of different social classes. Contrary to common media representations of oppressed Arab women, in many ways the women are more resourceful and adaptable to the new situation than Iraqi men, managing to ensure the survival of their families and themselves. Small informal business schemes, such as food catering, have mushroomed. Skills in crafts and the recycling of clothes and other materials give evidence to an incredible creativity. And without suggesting that there was anything natural about women being better human beings, if there is any hope for the future of Iraq, it does not lie with fragmented and divided male opposition groups, but hope comes from those who have kept their humanity and have remained human despite dehumanising conditions created by the sanctions regime, ongoing bombing and the oppressive policies of their won government. □

Trouble & Strife

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