Gender, Governance and Democracy

Women, Peace and Security:
Perspectives from Asia
Theorising and Practising
Peace and Security
Anuradha M. Chenoy

French Women of
Migrant Descent: Between the
Religious Extreme Right
and a Coward Left
Marieme Hélie-Lucas

ISIS MONOGRAPH SERIES 2005
ISSUE NO. 1, VOL. 2
Gender, Governance and Democracy:
Peace and Security

Editorial Team

Guest Editor	Josefa 'Gigi' Francisco
Managing Editor	Anjani Abella
Copy Editor	Marilen Abesamis
Assistant Copy Editor	Maria Melinda Ando
Lay-out and Graphics	Sonic 303 Computer Center
Graphics	Aileen Familara

Volume Contributors

Asia	Anuradha M. Chenoy
Europe	Marieme Hélie-Lucas

Gender, Governance and Democracy:

Peace and Security

Women, Peace and Security: Perspectives from Asia Theorising and Practising Peace and Security
Anuradha M. Chenoy

French Women of Migrant Descent: Between the Religious Extreme Right and a Coward Left
Marieme Hélie-Lucas

Contents

Preface

In the year 2005, Isis International-Manila (Isis-Manila) witnessed the consolidated shift of attention, energies and resources toward the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and the attempt to counter, if not, 'manage' the fast-rising state of global insecurity. As the world grapples and tries to keep pace with these developments, women now fear a backlash in the gains made toward their empowerment as women's participation and visibility in public spaces are gradually being curtailed. The low-key review of the status of women following the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action a decade ago, was reflective of an environment where women's interests still remain remote from State agenda.

Global capitalism is writing its script on the bodies and lives of women and girls as it intersects with globalised media and ICTs. Spaces for women's interaction are increasingly shrinking as organisations and networks work to strengthen trans-regional feminist activism and inter-movement dialogue in challenging new and old manifestations of neo-liberal globalisation. Thus, Isis-Manila presents "Gender, Governance and Democracy", the inaugural issue of the we! monograph series.

•
•
•
•
•
•
•
•

06

The we! monograph series is Isis-Manila's trans-regional publication that visibly facilitates cross-border understanding and analysis on cutting-edge issues and current affairs. Its purpose is to promote a deeper and critical interrogation of the inter-linkages of global trends and the broader development agenda. An alternative platform that interrogates issues from a feminist standpoint, the we! monograph puts forward the voices of women scholars and activists. Further, it seeks to elevate feminist perspectives and analyses in an attempt to generate awareness on our common sites of struggles against patriarchy, corporate hegemonies, right-wing ideological regimes, and empire-building.

In this inaugural issue, the selection of cross-border exchanges between Asia and Europe proceeds from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Philippines' (FES) international conference Women Shaping Democracy: Progressive Politics Ten Years After the World Conference on Women in Beijing in October 2005, co-organised by the Southeast Asian Women's Watch (SEAWWatch) and Isis-Manila. Isis-Manila extends its appreciation to colleagues in SEAWWatch, WAGI and FES, in particular, to FES former Director, Beate Martin, and former FES Southeast Asia Regional Gender Coordinator, Anja Koehler. The engagements that took place in this conference served as the bases for this monograph series.

Isis-Manila is immensely grateful to its long-time partner Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), for collaborating in producing this monograph series. We are especially grateful to the enthusiasm and commitment of the Executive Director of WAGI, Josefa 'Gigi' Francisco who served as this

issue's guest editor. The direction setting and production of this inaugural issue was made possible through the coordination and leadership of an inter-generational editorial team from Isis-Manila and WAGI comprised of Anjani Abella, Marilen Abesamis, Maria Melinda Ando, and Aileen Familara. We also extend our appreciation to the always reliable and ever-ready Sonic 303 for the cover design and Lithwerke for lay-out and printing services.

Finally, Isis-Manila also extends its utmost thanks to all its partners that continue to support and believe in our work and contributions toward people-centred development and social change. In particular, our gratitude goes to the Evangelisches Missionwerk/Church Development Service (EED–Germany), with complimentary funds drawn from the WAGI/UP-NCPAG (University of the Philippines–National College of Public Administration and Government)/UNDP (United Nations Development Program) Governance Portfolio Fund.

This monograph series compiles six critical opinion articles in three (3) volumes, namely [1] Women in Politics; [2] Gender and International Trade; and [3] Peace and Security. The series reflect Asian and European perspectives on current debates on gender, governance and democracy.

A common thread running through these rich cross-border essays is the call for the construction of democratic and gender-sensitive differentiated democracies with economies based on solidarity and not on profit. As such, in the larger debate of re-claiming peace, nation building, and state building, all essays call for the promotion of gender justice and equity and re-affirm

that real development will not take place without the promotion of women's empowerment and recognition of women's pro-active participation in public spaces.

Indeed much is left to be done.

Raijeli Drodrolagi Nicole
Executive Director
Isis International-Manila

Introduction

The issues of war, peace, and security constitute a large and important area where stereotyping of women persist, mainly because it is here where women's perspectives are sorely absent. The essays in this monograph insist that by dismissing the factor of gender relations in the analysis of these issues, the search for genuine peace and human security will remain futile. Both essays also suggest a failure in institutions, particularly, state mechanisms in protecting women from the threat of insecurity; the replication of violence and intolerance by resisting groups; and society's persistent and insidious subjugation of women in inculturated and traditionally patriarchal spaces.

The powerfully written essay by Marieme Hélie-Lucas negotiates through a labyrinth of factors and forces that served as context to two events in France, namely the passage of the national regulation on the veil in 2002 and the racial riots in 2005. In it, she gives a provocative analysis of how the spread of religious fundamentalism among third-generation immigrant men (and women) in France is linked to the complex dynamics in a state that

struggles to preserve secularism; a guilt-laden Left movement that is incapable of intervening positively; a media that spews confused, if not distorted political commentaries; and a growing mass of pauperised and disenfranchised youth of immigrant descent. Wary of these developments and searching for alternatives, Marieme raises the voices of immigrant women and calls for re-positioning, re-politicising and de-ethnicising of the debates in order to strike clarity on the real problem we are up against, and launch bold progressive discursive contestations and political struggles against religious extremisms of all kinds.

In providing a feminist critique of national security frameworks based on the realist school of thought, Anuradha Chenoy uncovers structures, language and institutions that hide several layers of the power and the powerlessness between colony and imperial states, classes of people, and men and women that result to militarising Asian peoples' thinking processes and actions. She examines how the rhetoric of women as 'peace bearers' is deployed by states and deplores how these states and anti-state movements share the same masculinist and militarist methods that target civilians and women. Where ethnic and communal conflicts are intense, we find brutal acts of violence against women, as in the cases of honour killing and maiming. Instead, she calls for states to move toward a human security framework that is clearly engendered and feminist to ensure that the dichotomies between the private and public spheres of a woman's life are transcended and women are fully protected from danger and violence.

Across the globe, religious extremist movements that have no tolerance for individual rights and choices co-exist with militaristic states

that use women as symbols of their own power over colonised peoples and subjugated nations. The scenario is frightening. Unless women's rights are recognised and protected, there will be no security for women and all peoples.

From these articles, it is important to note both authors' recommendations in pushing for collaborative work between the women's movements and women parliamentarians/politicians. Both call for the development of a feminist agenda that is able to formulate a critical understanding of the fast disappearing notions of nationalism, religious fundamentalism, secularism, among others in relation to the protection of women's rights as well as one that is able to strategically lobby for a stronger feminist lens for the 'engendering' of the human security framework brought together by the United Nations Commission on Human Security.

Anjani Abella and
Josefa 'Gigi' Francisco
Issue Editors

Women Peace and Security: Perspectives from Asia Theorising and Practising Peace and Security

By Anuradha M. Chenoy

Women's role in mediating, negotiating and keeping the peace is gradually being recognised as critical, a role that is an off-shoot of the women's movements. Asian women have struggled to find their place as peace makers, yet more often than not, they remain confronted with the same old questions and doubts about women in peace and security. Despite women's role and contribution in society, the burden they bear in times of conflict, and their responsibility for security, women's place on the peacetalk table remains minimal.

Where, for example, are the women in the ongoing peacetalks between the Indian government and the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim, or with the Hurriyat Conference? Are there women negotiators in the Sri Lankan and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE] negotiations? Or are women's representatives speaking on security issues and are governments listening across Asia? This paper explains why the security debate is important in Asia. It asks why the security debate stays male-centric. What are the implications of this persistent kind of thinking? How might it be changed?

What Do Women Have to Do with Security?

The predominant belief is that security is the 'hard' business of the state linked to secret national security choices and is based on military strength. When men [and the policymaking elite] talk of security issues, they essentially speak of state security defended through arms. Citizens' security is considered tied to the state: if the state is secure, citizens are expected to be secure. The security of the state is to be safeguarded by the latest weaponry, military skills, and other identifiable 'macho gadgets'. Decisions and budgets related to these are to be privileged and in many Asian states, the social expenditures are less prioritised than that of defense. Often, it is the women and peace movements that together oppose such privileging.

This interpretation of national security is seen as gender neutral, one that serves all men, women and all classes equally and is ethnically and culturally blind. This is the basic 'Realist vision' that has remained more or less static as a theory since Thomas Hobbes first spoke of the state of anarchy and the need to assert one's will. With some additions of elements like balance of power, containment, etc., the basic theory as transposed to the realm of the international system remains intact.

Of course, this theory has been challenged by radical critics and feminists who argue that this concept of security does not correspond to reality, and is skewed in favour of the state. They also point out that this notion of power is militarist and masculinist, that class relations and relations of colony/imperial state are, in the process, papered over. Details of the feminist and radical critique as opposed to the realist are simplified in Table 1.

Table 1. Feminist, Radical and Realist Visions of Security

	Realist Vision	Radical Critique and Vision	Feminist Critique and Vision
What is the state of the international system?	Anarchy prevails and thus the need for military force and possible nuclear force; A state of competition and conflict.	Anarchy does not preclude the search for hegemony or imperial dominance which can be as strong or stronger than anarchy. Anarchy is sustained by markets, neo-liberal globalisation, etc.	Anarchy claims and legitimises a politics of dominance [i.e. male use of force over women], sustains militarisation.
What is the field?	Only external and thus inter-state.	Domestic and international; have a dialectic link; both impact on each other.	Male discourse where women's voices are excluded.
Who is the main actor?	Primarily the State (seen as the unitary and rational actor posed above all national interest and some international institutions; non-state actors as domestic factors who are not really involved).	Realism excludes other actors, classes, etc.	The male elite whereas it should be both men and women.

	Realist Vision	Radical Critique and Vision	Feminist Critique and Vision
National Security: Protection of whom?	State/nation Citizens are protected by virtue of their state membership.	State as protector is also predator which protects elite/class interests; the poor and the marginalised are left out; national security is used to exercise control over other groups, especially dissenters.	Violence against women continues in public and private spheres, and women's security is not guaranteed by the state. Right to protect is linked with male power and women are seen as weak and vulnerable; The need to empower women; National security used to control women dissenters.
What is national interest? Whose national interest?	State is perceived as socially neutral. The assumption is that the citizen's identification with the nation over-rides all other social and political identifications and concerns. It assumes that identities are homogeneous, without contradictions, and unchanging. If identities are challenged, national identity must prevail.	National interest is nothing more than that of the prevailing regime, plus the elite/ruling coalition's interest. Identities are multiple and have contradictions and contestations. People's interests are not necessarily reflected in national interest.	National interest reflects mainly male interests, women's interests are left out of the idea of national interest, although they are not excluded from concept of nation as some minorities are. Citizenship for minorities has categories.
The value of International Relations [IR] Theory	Realism is value free and neutral.	Realism is a legitimising ideology, based on specific identity interests; social and political dynamics linked with the construction of theory; Ideology paints a picture of the world that serves to justify and perpetuate the social order it describes.	The male experience is represented as the only universal experience; The state mystifies its patriarchal base.

	Realist Vision	Radical Critique and Vision	Feminist Critique and Vision
IR Language	Is universally applicable.	Reflects hegemony.	Language of power/ virility example: warriors as embodying 'manhood', peacemakers as 'wimps'; Reinforces women's suppression and restricts their roles, i.e. 'women's work' 'motherhood', etc.
Power	Power is aggregate of territory, size, population, valued resources, political cohesion, economic strength, military strength over the other.	Power is empowerment of people; equity.	Power is empowerment of women. Gender parity; equality.
Use of power	Balance of power that implies competition and increasing one state power against the other; a zero sum game.	Importance of ethics in international politics and the need to pursue global justice.	Ethical pursuit of gender-just goal.

The other misconception that women's groups contest is that women are not essentially peacemakers and can, equally with men, play militarist roles. However, given that women continue to be under-represented in decision-making structures and often, from active warfare [a role that is gradually changing] women's image as peaceful is part of a prevailing popular discourse. Yet despite this, it is men who make the wars and negotiate for peace; women, despite being signifiers of peace are kept out of peace negotiations and deals.

The concept that links men with security and women with peace is reinforced by other symbols such as that of motherhood. Motherhood continues to signify empathy with the nation and is used repeatedly in Asian nations to generate feelings of nationalism, martyrdom and militarism. It is contrasted to the role of sons, in which the valour of sons is the natural binary to a mother's pain and sacrifice. This binary has implications for both genders.

Since the mother symbol is used interchangeably with the nation, women become signifiers of identity politics. As symbols, women are pressured to display cultural identities on their bodies, whether as dress codes, veils etc., unlike men. Consequently, women also suffer for being such symbols and can become victims of rape and abuse during conflicts as they represent the 'honour' of the community. Women's autonomy is controlled in the name of 'protecting' them against such onslaughts; their role is seen essentially as that of mothers and even young girls are trained into these roles. Women are devalued in contrast to the male in their households and in the community, because protecting their honour is seen as costly and the domestic work has only nominal economic value. During conflict, women and peace are both devalued. This devaluation is part and parcel of the concept of power itself that is seen as virile and masculine.

So strong are the popular binary of male/female with power/powerless that these translate into a subliminal national discourse in media, film and the language of the nations' leaders. Below are some examples of the gender discourse during India's nuclear experiments and the India-Pakistan tensions:

> **Example I:** *After India carried out nuclear tests in May 1998, newspapers and ruling right wing politicians were euphoric and the discourse was replete with chauvinist innuendos. (Asian Age, May 24, 1998)[1] "Vajpayee [the former prime minister] has released a flood of pent-up energy, generated a mood of heady triumphalism. He has kick-started India's revival of faith in itself. To the West, the five explosions are evidence of Hindu nationalism on a Viagra high. To Indians, it is evidence that there is nothing to fear but fear itself. Pokhran [the site of nuclear experiments] is only tangentially about security. Its significance is emotional. The target isn't China and Pakistan. It is the soul of India."(India Today, 1998) The underlying refrain was that the Indian bomb would restore the masculinity that had been eroded by the enemy other. Nuclear power was potent for the sake of power itself!*

Example II: *In South Asia, the leaders of India and Pakistan competed for 'manliness'. In October 2001, when relations were tense, President Musharaff gave a message to the Indian leadership: "We in Pakistan have not worn bangles and we can fight India on our own." (The Tribune, October 23, 2001). Prime Minister Vajpayee replied in a public address: "In Punjab where bangles are popular, people also wear 'Kada' [steel bracelet]." (The Tribune, November 1, 2001). The two berated each other for being feminine to the extent of wearing bangles, thus incapable of protecting their country or honour.*

Gender stereotypes get reinforced by such binaries. Those who do not conform to stereotypes risk being considered outsiders or anti-nationals. In reality, women play symbolic and real roles in all aspects of security and can be as supportive of war and militarism as men. It is the ideology of feminism, peace, and other progressive visions that make humans peaceful. However, given their experience of war, conflict and pain, and their roles as pivots in the family, women can be more prone to vote for peace. (The Kashmir Times, May 1, 2001).[2] Since women have to negotiate for survival, they find it natural to negotiate for peace at the grassroots level.

The ideology of nationalism that pervades Asia promotes a concept of family and home as women's principal arena and even if they work outside the home, this remains their prime responsibility. This view frees men from domestic responsibility which is assigned to women or surrogate housekeepers, and thereafter devalued. Women's role as nurturer, caretaker and sacrificing supporter for those [mostly males] who are supposedly in the forefront of direct military or non-military confrontation is thus ingrained in public imagination and private functionings. The possibilities of a trans-country feminism which will emphasise the common concerns of Asian women, and by extension, of ordinary Asians, remain hampered by the dominance of such ideologies, and further reinforced when security is threatened, or when conflicts rise.

Does Asia Need a Gendered Human Security Paradigm?

Women's activism for peace is particularly important for Asia, a region of increasing conflicts. The history of most Asian states shows the recurrence of armed conflicts fueled by territorial, ethnic, religious, class and caste differences. The trend within globalisation shows that conflicts are likely to increase as fewer people control more resources. Of the current armed conflicts world wide, almost 40% are in Asia and most of these have remained unresolved for decades. These conflicts continue to be viewed within the traditional security discourse. Women now need to question these frameworks and present viable alternatives.

Most of these Asian conflicts have ethnic origins that took on secessionist character. Two are struggles against occupation; one is opposition to a military government; one is a struggle for economic and political change and some are related to territorial disputes. Besides these armed conflicts, inter-community/sectarian violence, gender and caste/class based violence and unrest have been part of Asian states' history. (The World's Armed Conflicts site, Retrieved February 15, 2006; International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Retrieved February 15, 2006).[3]

An analysis of Asian conflicts shows some common indicators. Most are rooted in civil society and extend into social and political institutions of the state. For instance, one would find class, caste, ethnic, religious, gender based biases, practises and policies in most social, economic and political institutions. Political parties use these divisions in different ways. States in Asia have been far from neutral in most of these conflicts, and have resorted to militarist nationalism and sought legitimacy by evoking images of perceived

threats, territorial disintegration, and 'national honour'. They have used the armed forces to control and manage the conflict, and have attempted negotiations only after much bloodshed and terror, or after intervention from 'outside powers' [Thus conflicts in Cambodia, East Timor, Sri Lanka, Georgia, Palestine have all come under international pressure].

All these States have promulgated draconian national security laws and shown a record of systematic human rights violations especially in areas of conflict. All have seen increases in their military budgets, the number of armed forces and weapons acquisitions (SIPRI, 2003). In three of the Asian states, official military expenditure as percentage of GDP is higher than expenditures on education and health combined. Two states are openly supportive of nuclear development and testing and two are known to have nuclear programmes. There is evidence of increasing militarisation in all these states.

The ethnic/secessionist/anti-state movements in all these states have many common features. Many begin as demands for justice or social change and are often based on ethnic sub-nationalism. Many have, within their movements, sections that use violent strategies, labeled as terrorism. Many are hierarchical, based on military principles, and are 'underground'. Most use women cadres in their operations, most of whom however are mere support cadres and are lower in the power hierarchy. Many ethnic secessionist and anti-regime/state movements valorise force, often because of the failure of other methods. The use of violence however, has its own logic that leads to a militarisation of these movements with all its attendant problems.

These approaches to security where both the state and anti-state movements are highly militarised have implications for civil society that have been documented all over Asia. The largest number of people who have been killed, hurt, maimed and targeted for abuse, have been civilians and women. These conflicts have generated large numbers of internally displaced persons and millions of refugees. Six of the states engaged in armed conflicts rank low in the Human Development Index (HDI) and six fall in the medium HDI scale. The Gender Development Index Ranking for five of these states is among the lowest in the world. Women have been subjected to violence and degradation on the basis of 'honour'. Women have been disproportionately affected, as the largest number of those displaced and made refugees [70%] have been women. In most Asian countries, women lose their status in society; as widows, rehabilitation packages for women have been smaller than those given to men, and in many instances, compensation due them is taken over by their extended families and do not personally benefit them. These conflicts have reported rape and sexual abuse of women as a method of punishment for the entire community. Raped women and widows are further shunned because social barriers prevent their re-marriage. Domestic violence increases in situations of conflict and post-conflict as the trauma on men increases. Children have been caught in the crossfire and have been killed, maimed and traumatised. There have also been reported use of child soldiers, kidnappings, etc. in all these conflicts.

All these show that Asian states need to re-examine their security strategies. States that use primarily state-centred and militarist methods of security have failed to solve conflicts and have only 'managed' or controlled

them temporarily with the use of force. Several paradigms that differ from traditional security have been advocated ranging from comprehensive security, feminist notions of peace, and human security. The Human Security approach is based on the premise that human rights and needs are necessary for security and that conflicts occur when rights are denied and needs repressed, as our examples from Asian states show. The Human Security approach has evolved with the human development approach and has been brought together by the United Nations Commission on Human Security (Human Security Now, 2003; Thakur, 2004). It complements state security by broadening and democratising security since issues like identity politics or the neglect of social justice can become central issues, just as they have become in many inter-ethnic rivalries or sectarian conflicts.

Human Security argues that people's security should be a critical part of the state's concern without diluting state interests. This people-centred approach is a radical departure from that of traditional security. The Human Security concept however assumes that women's security will follow 'naturally' if Human Security is accepted. However, we argue that a merger with feminist concerns on security should be made. Gender needs to be designed and mainstreamed into the Human Security discourse, in the absence of which women's security would remain in the margins.

Women's security is not guaranteed either by peace or in times of war.[4] Women's insecurity can come from within the family, from community conflict, from state or interstate sources. This insecurity is largely invisible in the private sphere and gendered in the public sphere.[5] Furthermore, women's insecurity does not have to be measured merely in terms of violence or the absence of it. This insecurity is linked to her roles, status, and identity.

Structural discrimination against women remains in most societies [in different degrees, with cultural and economic variations] and is linked to perceptions of women's roles. Women remain absent from most spheres of public policy-making and this ensures the domination of agendas that exclude them. This results in routine [domestic] violence and intersects with structural violence. Violence from routine and structural conflict remains hidden because it does not fit the state-centric criterion (Pickup, Williams & Sweetman, 2001). Nor do policy strategies aimed at preventing and mitigating violent conflict adequately address its impact on women, who remain in the private sphere.

In times of armed conflict, institutional structures break down and replaced by militarised ones, patriarchal controls increase and gender differences are essentialised. Women's identities are re-drawn to meet the needs of militarised nationalism and become 'mother of the nation,' 'rape victim,' 'martyr's mother,' 'half widow,' or 'war widow,' identities that symbolise shared victimisation and solidarity. These symbols in turn generate feelings of retribution and nationalism. In recent armed conflicts, women have been constructed as cultural symbols, signifiers of the 'honour' of their community, family, and nation. They are either seen as subjects to be protected and confined to the private sphere, behind veils and walls [From Kashmir to Afghanistan], or violated as symbols of the enemy 'other'(Enloe, 1998; Chenoy, 2002). This stereotyping makes women easy targets of gendered crime like rape and forced prostitution (Turshen, 2001; Jefferson, 2004; Human Rights Watch World Report 2004, Retrieved last February 15, 2006).[6] Female relatives of offenders or of the 'other side' are targeted to collectively punish the other side. While abuse against men gets publicity, all sides have a conspiracy of silence against abuse of women.

Guaranteeing 'people's security' does not automatically ensure women's security. Approaches to security should be engendered. This calls for a further feminisation of the Human Security approach. Legal experts and international lawyers have shown that most domestic and international law needs to be gender sensitive. The 'neutrality' of legal institutions invisibilises gender biases inherent in them. Many constitutions, especially in the South, provide for equality to all, yet the interpretation of laws does not give women the same rights enjoyed by men. Traditions, customary laws, social customs, and culture back these inequalities, which take much longer to change even after laws have been enacted (All South Asian states show this dichotomy). It has been repeatedly shown that negotiated settlements exclude women's issues, since they are always relegated to a 'later' day solution. For example, while the violation of women's rights was a reason for regime change of the Taliban, women in post-Taliban Afghanistan still feel unsure of equal rights either in society or before law.   Women's movements are still struggling that women's rights to be included in the human rights agenda.

Feminists support the Human Security approach, but want to engender it because experience has shown that the concept of 'people' generally leaves out women, especially those at the margins. Further, while structures and institutions remain patriarchal, women who are part of these processes also accept patriarchal and nationalist regimes and internalise their values. It is the women's movements, feminists and others who want to change the basis of power, who question traditional security and patriarchy. Clearly, feminists argue for both a gender balance as well as a feminisation of security.

The Human Security approach establishes that conflict data has been state-centred and not people-centred. These omissions have far-reaching

implications, as violence remains hidden when it does not fit into the state-centric approach. The strategies to prevent and mitigate conflict then do not adequately address communities at risk, instead they address official authorities. The national sovereignty perspective restricts rather than allows for shared responsibility (Human Security Now, 2003). A gendered approach would take the argument further, to show that the most invisible group in conflicts to date have been women. There is little data and analysis of the gendered nature of conflicts, or even the implication of wars on women mainly because wars have been fought, chronicled, and analysed by men. Human security even when people-oriented will have to be engendered.

Women's insecurity is a major concern of international organisations. Women's groups and social movements have emphasised this and has also been recorded by the UN resolution 1325. There is thus an unambiguous logic and necessity of merging these two concepts. Women's security needs to be defined and measured in different national, regional and local situations. Gendered Human Security Indicators similar to the Gender Development Index that is used in the Human Development Reports can evolve to highlight women and communities at risk. These indicators will identify trends and share comprehensive cross-regional information to promote an understanding of the gendered nature of conflicts. Feminist analysts have related the roles, needs, and capabilities of women and men in conflict and shown the gendered causes of war (Sikoska & Solomon, 1999). The gendered nature of power in every human interaction, as suggested by analysts, needs to be measured at different points, specific to regional conflicts, before, during and after armed conflicts (Moser & Clark, 2001). This is necessary for revealing the extent of damage caused by women's insecurity to civil and political society. Such analysis helps design pre-emptive steps and effective policy.

Conclusion

Women's experiences as peacemakers and the internationally vibrant women's movements have shown the gendered human security approach in their interventions in conflict situations. Women who have invariably combined the political, the social and the personal in their politics and who are flexible grassroots organisers are the most effective propagators of such security concepts. The success of concepts like human security rests with civil society activists, NGO's and social movements. A robust civil society is more effective in influencing foreign policy where a human security perspective is operative rather than where traditional notions and practice of security predominate.

It is evident that the concept of Human Security is a necessary and empowering idea with potential to improve human existence when accepted by states. However, the idea remains incomplete because, as our arguments have shown, the prevailing concept of peoples' security allows for the repetition of gendered structures in times of peace and conflict. These gendered structures are linked with other conflicts in the spiral of violence. For Human Security to be complete, it is necessary to engender the concept of Human Security and to use it where it is needed most in Asia.

References

Asian Age (1998, May 24). Calcutta: Asian Age.

Chenoy, A. (2005). A Plea for Engendering Human Security. *International Studies*, *42* (2), 167 – 179.

Chenoy, A. (2002). *Militarism and Women in South Asia* (pp. 31 – 33). New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Commission on Human Security. (2003). *Human Security Now*, New York: United Nations.

Connel, R.W. (1990). State, Gender and Sexual Politics. *Theory and Society, 19,* 507 – 544.

Eisenstein, Z. (1981). *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (p. 26). New York: Longman.

Enloe, C. (1998). All the Men are Militias, All the Women are Victims: The Politics of Masculinity and Femininity in Nationalist Wars. In L. Lorentzen & J. Turpin (Eds.), *The Women and War Reader* (pp. 50 – 62). New York: New York University Press.

Grant, R. (1991). The Sources of Gender Bias in International Relations Theory. In K. Newland & R. Grant (Eds.), *Gender and International Relations* (p. 9). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

International Peace Research Institute in Oslo website. (n.d.) Retrieved February 15, 2006, from <http://www.prio.no/cwp/armedconflict/>

Jefferson, L.R. (2004). In War as in Peace: Sexual Violence and Women's Status. *Human Rights Watch World Report 2004: Human Rights and Armed Conflict*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

Moser, C. O.N. & Clark F.C. (2001). *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Peterson, V.S. (1992). Security and Sovereign States. In V.S. Peterson (Ed.), *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)visions of International Relations Theory* (p. 33). London: Lynne Riener Press.

Pickup F., Williams, S., & Sweetman C. (2001). *Ending Violence Against Women: A Challenge for Development and Humanitarian Work*. London: Oxfam.

Preiswerk, R. (1981). Could We Study International Relations as if People Mattered?. In Feller, Gordon, et.al, *Peace and World Order Studies: A Curriculum Guide* (p. 8). New York: Transnational Academic Program, Institute for World Order

The World's Conflicts website. (n.d.). Retrieved February 15, 2006, from <http://www.jmk.su.se/global99/conflicts/>

Rosenburg, J. (1990): What's the Matter with Realism?. *Review of International Studies, 16*, 285 – 303.

Sikoska, T. & Solomon, J. (1999, December). *Introducing Gender in Conflict and Conflict Prevention: Conceptuals and Policy Implications*. Paper presented at the UNU, INSTRAW Meeting in Santo Domingo.

Steans, J. (1998). *Gender and International Relations: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Sylvester, C. (1994). *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Post Modern Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Teschke, B. (2003). *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations*. London: Verso.

Thakur, R. (2004). A Political Worldview. *Security Dialogue,* 35 (3), 347.

Tickner, J.A. (1992). *Gender in International Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Turshen, M. (2001). The Political Economy of Rape: An Analysis of Systematic Rape and Sexual Abuse of Women during Armed Conflict in Africa. In C.O.N. Moser & F. Clark (Eds.), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence* (pp. 55 – 57). New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Vanaik, A. (2005), 1945 to 1989: The Realist Paradigm and Systemic Duality. In K. Bajpai & S. Mallavarapu (Eds.), *International Relations in India: Bringing Theory Back Home* (pp. 400 – 422). New Delhi: Orient Longman.

Walt, S. (1991). The Renaissance of Security Studies. *International Studies Quarterly, 35*, 211 – 240.

Endnotes

[1] *"We are no longer eunuchs": Statement by Shiv Sena [The Right wing party in coalition with the ruling coalition during that period] chief Bal Thakrey who had argued that the Hindus were not masculine enough and the bomb had empowered them. Earlier governments that had not carried out nuclear tests were described "as a bunch of eunuchs."*

[2] *A survey on the proposed peace talks between the Indian government and the Hurriyat Conference (the main Kashmiri political organisation) carried out in April 2001 attended by 2,400 Kashmiris from all 6 districts in the Valley, showed that 80% women and 52% men supported the peace talks. Interestingly, all women above the age of 36 wanted the peace talks, whereas only 62 percent men in the same age group supported the talks. Clearly then, it was the 'mothers' who were voting for peace.*

[3] *The ethnic conflicts with some secessionist character are found in: Aceh (and earlier East Timor) in Indonesia; Moro in the Philippines; the Naga, Manipur, and other North East Indian and Kashmir conflicts in India; the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka; the separatist conflicts in Myanmar and Thailand. Two are struggles against occupation: Palestine and Iraq. One is in opposition to a military government: Myanmar; while the other calls for economic and political change: Nepal; One is a territorial conflict: India-Pakistan and some are based on issues that remain unresolved since the Second World War: North and South Korea and China and Taiwan. Afghanistan continues to have armed conflicts in several regions. This data is available from websites including The World's Armed Conflicts site and the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo.*

4 Surveys show that up to 80% of women worldwide suffer domestic and other violence. "One in Three Women Worldwide Could Suffer Violence Directed at Her Simply Because She Is Female," UNIFEM press release (November 24, 2003).

5 Suggested websites for further exploration of the topic are the "Sexual Assault Statistics" in www.stopfamilyviolence.org.; and The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) <http://www.unifem.undp.org/CEDAW/>.

6 The Human Rights Watch World Report 2004 can be downloaded in PDF form from the HRW website <http://hrw.org/wr2k4/>.

About the Author

Anuradha M. Chenoy is a Professor in the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University [JNU] New Delhi. She has been chairperson and director of the Centre for Russian, Central Asian and East European Studies, JNU and has been on the governing bodies of several institutions and schools in India. She has been a specialist at the United Nations NGO Conference on Human Security in September 2003 and is a founding member of groups like the Asian Peace Alliance; Pakistan-India Forum for Peace and Democracy; and Women in International Affairs in Asia. Anuradha is a member of the intellectual activist network, the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA) and in the most recent years had analysed and written more extensively on militarism and militarisation, as well as, human security.

French Women of Migrant Descent: Between the Religious Extreme Right and a Coward Left

By Marieme Hélie-Lucas

The international press has focused media attention on France on two occasions in the past two years: during the public controversy around the so-called 'Islamic veil' at the beginning of year 2004, and during the riots in the suburbs[1] in year 2005. These events are intimately linked. Arguably, international media overplayed reports of violence of 'communities', while underplaying 'citizens'' initiatives, thus publishing unethical one-sided reports.

However, the media's biggest mistake was to analyse the incidents in an un-gendered way; there were huge discrepancies in both events as well as in the reactions to them, in regard to whether we are talking of men or women, of boys or girls. We will also look into the increasingly isolated political position of France in Europe and in the rest of the world amidst debates on secularism vs. multiculturalism, citizenship vs. community, and the growing threat to women's rights coming from the hijacking of the concept of "tolerance" by extreme right forces while a Coward Left, which for fear of being accused of racism, adopts 'angelism' towards religious fundamentalism. Our own reading will be based on public statements and actions of women of North African migrant descent during these events.

What happened in France concerns us all, for we may rightly fear that France is the laboratory where the new entryist strategies of fundamentalists are being tested and that they will expand to other countries. This will be to the immense detriment of women.

Migrants, Migrant Women and Women of Migrant Descent in France

The vast majority of 'migrants' in France come from North Africa, particularly Algeria. They are undifferenciatedly referred to as 'Arabs.' Migration from other former colonies in Africa is more recent, and migrants from these countries started referring to themselves as 'blacks.' Migration from Asia (mostly Vietnamese, then Chinese) is far less important, while migration from South Asia is virtually invisible.

Migration is an ancient source of cheap labour that started after World War I and rose in numbers after World War II. A qualitative change in the nature of migration occurred when the French government allowed families to join

migrant male workers. Documentary films by Yasmina Benguigui, a French citizen of Algerian descent, on the history of migrants from North Africa in France, speak eloquently to this change. Women promptly changed their traditional outfits for working class dresses and made use of French laws to step out of their houses and traditional roles entered the labour force and sent their daughters to school, thus allowing a whole generation of young French women of migrant descent to climb the social ladder. The law on citizenship in France is based on soil, not on blood, i.e. any child born on French soil enjoys French citizenship. Moreover, being the parent of French children is a legal ground for applying for French citizenship.

But there is a great distinction between the desire of previous generations of migrant descent for merging into French society and the claim for 'difference' of the present generation – often constituted by the third or fourth generation born and raised in France, hence in most cases French citizens. For racial discrimination and marginalisation of these sections of the population have grown, in an economic context where the whole French population is facing more and more difficulties in terms of stable employment, decent housing, etc. Within this context of general pauperisation, youths of migrant descent are more affected than the rest of the population. As Tokia Saifi, State Secretary on Sustainable Development, said:

> *This law is indispensible to set limits and to put an end to skids, but a real policy of integration should absolutely be added to it… By not taking into account the problems of discrimination regarding housing and employment, especially as it affects specifically populations of migrant descent and among them particularly the youth, a communal withdrawal has been facilitated and conflicts have been exacerbated.*

> *The percentage of unemployment is above 50%[2] in suburbs where families of foreign origin are parked. Fundamentalist movements used the failure of our integration policy to extend their reach.*

It is in the above context that one should look at the anti-secularist and pro-veil campaigns, and the recent riots. To a situation of oppression and discrimination, there can be various responses: a response from the Left and a response from the Right, a response as citizen and a response as community, but also a response from men as men and a response from women as women. Typically, the response from women has been an integrationist position, in which, like their grandmothers and great grandmothers who came decades ago to follow their husbands into migration and settled in France, they made the best possible use of laws and ways of life to assert their independence and empowerment. Zohra, 36, production assistant said:

> *My mother, who is Algerian, stood against the veil. Twenty years ago, this was not a topic of interest, nobody would mention it.*

It is important to note that the first male migrant workers from North Africa were mostly often employed in big companies such as in the car manufacturing sector, mining, textile industry – in sectors where unions were well organised and powerful. These workers acquired a class culture that facilitated integration into the national workers movement, as well as personal interaction with their male French colleagues through experience of class solidarity. Some degree of change also affected families and the role of women. Documentary accounts as well as the fiction work of film makers of migrant descent focus on visible signs of integration of women such as the language spoken at home, dress codes, attention paid to schooling of children of both sexes, and the beginning of access to wage labour. Recalled Safia, 29, vice president of Ni Putes Ni Soumises, NPNS [see page 39], Clermont-Ferrand:

> *The Muslim woman is not a veiled woman. Under pressure, some women feel that they are not good Muslims if they do not wear it. But everywhere in the world, women fight for their emancipation, just like our mothers have done before us.*

The organisation of the working class in France has been steadily declining over the past decades. It has left a vacuum in which fundamentalism has grown and is now strongly affecting the reactions of younger male generations to the unacceptable economic and social discrimination they face.

Today too, girls massively use the opportunity of free schooling in primary and secondary state schools, as well as in state universities to access the labour market with better conditions than their foremothers. Moreover, their use of French language remains a visible sign of belonging for girls, while their brothers clumsily sprinkle their sentences with a couple of Arabic words – a language that they do not speak – and pretend an Arabic accent in French. Girls of migrant descent are generally doing well in schools, while their brothers constitute the vast majority of school drop-outs, and of the unemployed youth.[3] Warda, 23, manager, Neuilly Plaisance said:

> I have no problem with my identity. I am a French citizen, of Algerian culture, my religion is Islam. I speak Arabic, I know the history of my family, and I used to go to Algeria on holidays. This prevented me from fantasising about my country of origin or from having a distorted image of my culture.

There is a recurrent dichotomy between boys and girls, men and women, in relation to communalism vs. citizenship and therefore in the reactions to the veil and the riots.

Protest as Citizens vs. Protest as Community: Women of Migrant Descent Make a Stand

Two important people's protests have marked the recent history of social movements in France, both initiated by youths of migrant descent.

In 1984, a group of four young men of North African descent started a March in protest against employment discrimination. They called themselves 'La Marche des Beurs' [Beurs' March] – 'Beur' being a non-derogatory slang for 'Arab' that the youths invented for themselves. Symbolically, they marched from Marseilles [the very port on the southern Mediterranean coast that has seen most migrants from North Africa disembark on the soil of France] to Paris [the seat of government]. All along their way, in cities, towns and villages, they talked to people about their situation and urged them to support their cause – it was a 'long march' indeed. Thousands of French citizens [both of migrant and non-migrant descent], mostly young people, joined them. It was a citizens' movement that the French state could not ignore any more. When this crowd reached Paris, they had to be heard by the authorities. The march received fantastic media coverage and social problems that stemmed from discrimination and marginalisation of citizens of migrant descent got publicly debated.

This initiative gave impetus to many other people's organisations which, like the Marche des Beurs, positioned themselves as citizens' movements and drew into their struggle crowds that were not personally or directly affected by racism. By doing so, they made a strong political statement that the plea of any sub-category of people was every citizen's concern as it affected society as a whole, and that it should not be dealt with exclusively by those directly affected. Their success was the strongest statement made against communalism in recent years.

But despite the large outreach and the attention of the media, government promises were not completely fulfilled. Some leaders of the movement were co-opted. The main parties and unions, as they have steadily done since the sixties, did not jump into the bandwagon to support and sustain a protest they had neither initiated nor controlled. Disillusion followed and

opposite political forces took advantage of the situation, where at the other end of the political spectrum, communal movements, largely inspired by those born in the UK a few decades ago, work towards the privatisation of social problems. They believe racism and discrimination are the exclusive burden of affected communities and combating those is their prerogative, not that of all citizens. And as in most political movements in our own countries of origin, political, racial, and religious identities are blurred and lumped together. Thus, it is neither as citizens nor as full members of a society and a country that one has chosen to live in, nor as members of a political organisation providing an analysis of a given problem, that they fight social problems – but exclusively as 'Muslims,' as 'Blacks.' This ideological stance avoids reference to any class difference. This presumed homogeneity is challenged by the rise of a 'black bourgeoisie.' The political demand for social justice is being replaced by the religious praise for '*zakat*' [the dime given as charity].

Moreover, it stamps an identity on all people whose parents come from a Muslim country or community, a religious identity that few of them actually could claim. It is as if an unwashable 'original sin' had been imprinted at birth by virtue of blood, denying to religion the status of a free spiritual choice.

Thinking back at the laxity and tolerance that such ideology has met within the Left, one could hardly imagine a similar discourse remaining unchallenged if it were, for instance, racism against Jews that were at stake. No one would ever dare claim that this is the exclusive problem of Jews; no one would dare deny that this is indeed the problem of the whole of France. But the fundamentalists benefit from the white guilt and the fear to appear racist or anti-Islam that characterise the Left at present.

Not surprisingly, young male of migrant descent, discriminated against as citizens and recently reborn as 'Blacks' or as 'Muslims' under the influence of fundamentalist communalist groups, do not turn a blind eye to the strategy of girls that 'betray their identity' by trying more successfully than boys to carve a niche for themselves within French society. Aicha, 34, social worker at Fontenay-sous-bois said:

> Today, the little brothers are the ones who tell their mothers: your daughter must be veiled. This is the culture of the suburbs. What upsets me? That the extremists monopolise the attention of the state and of the media. Nobody listens to Muslims that do not create any problem, who practice their religion in the private sphere.

Gangs of young males patrol the suburbs to send girls back home and punish them for supposedly 'un-Islamic' behavior. This includes wearing fashionable clothes, speaking to boys in public, etc. The 'punishment' includes, as in our countries of origin, public insults, public humiliation, public beatings, collective rape, acid throwing, death sentence by stoning, etc. Said Fadoua, 25, student, Corbeil-Essonne:

> In my suburb, the street belongs to boys, girls stay at home. The outside space, the right to speak, everything is limited. I do not want to be reduced to that. The suburb is like a big family, with the same inconveniences. One cannot step out of one's role, or one has to leave.

The French police have long forgotten areas where they cannot enter without being attacked in various ways by disoccupied young men, who, let us not forget, at this point, are indeed facing racism and violence by the police.

Apart from schools, most state services are no longer available in areas where employees, as representatives of the state, fear attacks. Further, fire brigades hesitate to enter some areas. Fundamentalist groups, who have both the huge finances and the will to do it, used this vacuum to provide alternative social services that the French state fails to provide, while using the opportunity to convert minds. They take care of widows and poor families via various systems of donations, charity, dime [*zakat*]. They coach children who need support with their school work, they open sports clubs, they offer an alternative to drugs, etc. At the same time, they offer free headscarves and the so-called 'Islamic dress' to women, preach 'Islamic morality', draw men and boys to the mosques, teach combat sports to potential future *djihadis* and have them travel widely, etc. Among the non-local fighters who were identified in Algeria, Bosnia and the Philippines, as well as those involved in the bombings of Bali, Madrid, London or Paris were those trained in these suburbs.

But one cannot fail to mention that a significant number of young men from totally 'French French' descent, who share with those of 'Muslim' descent poverty, unemployment, and rage, have also joined these trainings and have been found participating in the recent major bombings in Europe. It is estimated that there are 60,000 'French French' converted to Islam. Some of them are well known intellectuals and artists, and many of the young ones come from the same lower middle class and the same suburbs.

A citizens' movement emerged in the late nineties, that confronted the situation. Led by young women from North African descent, it has taken the torch from the hands of the initial Marche des Beurs and is presently expanding into other countries of Europe. In response to crimes committed against women and girls by the new 'Muslim militia' that govern entire

suburbs in France, they gave themselves the provocative name of 'Ni Putes Ni Soumises.' Its acronym is NPNS whose literal translation is: 'Neither Whores, Nor Submissive.' This name asserts that being socially active citizens of France who enjoy the normal rights of citizens in education, freedom of movement, freedom of belief, etc. does not make them 'prostitutes,' 'of loose morality,' as male youth often accuses them of being. But they will neither submit to male orders, nor to male interpreted God's orders. Said Saoudia, 23, student at Nice:

> *Religion is in the heart, not in the head.*

The birth of this social movement was sparked by a horrifying crime committed in Vitry sur Seine, a suburb of Paris, against a 17 year old girl who was burnt alive in the garbage cell of the building where she lived with her family. Her name, Sohane, is now on a street sign that is heartbreakingly permanently degraded by male youth -- and replaced, under pressure from NPNS. It says enough that, like in Algeria under fundamentalist rule for instance, this is not seen as a crime but a 'sinner's just punishment.' Recalled Asma, 28, psychologist at Saint Ouen:

> *I was born in Algeria, I witnessed the rise of fundamentalism. Disoccupied boys who force you to wear a head scarf, mosques that rise like mushrooms, the social discourse, the extremists who pose as victims, etc. They are doing the same thing in France…*

Following this crime, a small number of women and even fewer men, started marching from the city of Clermont Ferrand, in the center of France, to Paris. And like their predecessors, they stopped in towns and villages, informing fellow citizens along the way, and denouncing in one sweep the discrimination and racism they were victims of, the rise of fundamentalism

that effectively put them under death threats and the lax attitude of the state. Since its inception, the NPNS movement has worked towards forcing the state to face its responsibility regarding the protection of all citizens.

Unfortunately, these crimes against women are increasing. Each time NPNS calls for a huge demonstration, together with smaller women's organisations that have surged in recent years, it draws more and more people that are not of migrant descent but who feel totally concerned as citizens.

Fundamentalist groups do not fail to discredit these demonstrations and their initiators as racist and 'Islamophobic' – despite the public stance taken by courageous progressive Imams who unveil the fundamentalist hijacking of Islam, in which progressive believers cannot recognise their faith.

On the one hand, the growing discrimination against French people of migrant descent – and citizens' initiative to fight it in which women have taken the major lead , and on the other hand, the communal withdrawal led by fundamentalists constitute the context where one should look at the two major political events in France that have stirred international media – the veil controversy and the riots.

The Veil Controversy and Other Attacks on French Secularism

It is a major success of fundamentalists that the world now labels the French law on secularism 'the law against the veil,' unwittingly supporting the fundamentalist claim that the French state is essentially 'Islamophobic'!

It is NOT a law against the veil. This law, which has been revived and reworded recently, dates from 1906, at a time when France was curtailing the power of the Catholic Church to interfere into the politics of the French state and when migration from Muslim contexts was statistically insignificant. The law proclaims the separation between state and religion; it guarantees freedom of belief and of practice to all religions. Beyond the basic protection of all believers, however, the state will not interfere with religions, will in fact ignore religions, as it sees beliefs as belonging to the private domain (Pena Ruiz in WLUML website, Retrieved last February 17, 2006).

This concept of secularism is a far cry from that of many other European countries. In the UK, for example, the Queen is both the Head of State and the Head of the Anglican Church. In Germany, the provincial states [the 'lander'] collect taxes that are redistributed to churches, and religion is taught in state schools as part of the curriculum. In many other countries, ID documents make mention of religion, one swears in court on the Bible, etc. Secularism for these countries means equal tolerance of all religions, but French secularism just does not consider that religion falls within state mandate.

Consequently, religious signs are not allowed in areas that are symbolic of the Republic. These spaces must remain strictly neutral and republican. Hence, children and teachers in primary and secondary state schools, and civil servants when they are in contact with the public, i.e. when they represent the secular Republic vis-à-vis citizens, cannot wear a cross, kippa, veil, etc. At the same time, the Republic guarantees the right of all citizens to wear these religious signs in any other space not symbolic of the secular Republic, i.e., in the streets, at work, etc. That this tolerant and balanced law – which in fact protects and guarantees religious rights of all as

well as the rights of citizens who do not profess any religion – is now seen as anti-Islam only shows the lobbying power of fundamentalist groups linked internationally and their abuse of human rights concepts.

Fundamentalist movements have opened a new front in Europe and North America, where they apply exactly the same tactics they tried in our countries of origin. They use people's legitimate discontent, occupy the vacuum left by a failing state and do away with citizenship. They promote religious and racial identities, redefine social problems in terms of communalism, and finally, take steps toward ending secularism. As Farida, 27, social worker at Narbonne, said:

> *I stand for all mixed spaces: in school, in the swimming pool, in marriage, in the suburbs... otherwise one moves from geographical ghetto to mental ghetto and to communalism.*

In France, they currently attack and challenge the very roots of the secular republic, in the name of religious identity. They demand not only the 'right to veil' [which sadly reminds us of the 'right to female genital mutilation' in the name of cultural rights in the seventies, and other discriminatory and painful 'rights' that apply exclusively to females!]. They also demand other forms of male/female segregation, among them the segregation of sexes in schools, a different curriculum for boys and girls that will eliminate from the girls' course subjects such as biology, arts, music and sports, separate swimming pools, separate wards in public hospitals and female doctors, nurses and other paramedical personnel in female hospitals – all this at a time when state hospitals lack basic personnel, whether male or female.

It is in this context that the 'right to veil' became a misguided international media campaign led by fundamentalists. It is a right that is

perfectly legal everywhere in France, except in primary and secondary state schools [i.e. for minors under the age 16] and in public administration when civil servants are in public functions.

Alas, the decision to maintain and update the secularist law was promptly opposed by human rights campaigners and large sections of the Left and of the Far Left fighting in the name of tolerance and anti-racism, as well as religious rights and cultural rights. At no point did they see that this attack on the law was part of a world wide fundamentalist concerted action which would destroy not only women's rights, but human rights in general. The Left, alas again, has long taught us not to count on it to support women's rights [which always come last – after the revolution, after independence, etc.]. Indeed, this fundamentalist action would damage the notion of citizenship, as well as progressive social movements. According to Meriem, 25, lawyer:

> When I hear a girl say: The veil protects me, I respond: No, it is the Republic that protects you.

That the French and European Left can be blinded by their 'white guilt,' their colonial memories, and their traditional anti-state position is one thing; but our own Left in Third World countries is likewise betraying the emerging democratic opposition to fundamentalism. As they have done when the people of Algeria – and not just our corrupt government – was desperately fighting the Islamic Salvation Front [FIS], Islamic Armed Groups [GIA] and the like at the cost of their very lives [several hundred thousands died in the hands of fundamentalists], some of our brightest Third World intellectuals on the Left see no problem in promoting a near fascist political force provided it attacks the state and imperialism. Fundamentalist speakers are invited to Social Fora and given platforms in alternative spaces and media that once were created to give us, progressive social movements, public space.

Taken by exoticism, rather than being politically and ethically responsible, the international media widely publicised the only two small, Paris-based, demonstrations of veiled women flanked by bearded men.

Meanwhile, regardless of the actual danger they faced for doing so, thousands of women from migrant descent, political exiles from countries such as Iran and Algeria who suffered under fundamentalist rule, as well as progressive men including Muslim religious authorities (Bencheikh, 1998), have gone public on national mass media in support of a law that does guarantee their freedom of religion while protecting them as well from the intrusion of religion into the state, a situation which they experienced in their countries, and fled from. They gathered in several huge demonstrations that were ignored by the media outside France – to them, it was just not 'politically correct.'

Fadela Mrabet, President of NPNS, spoke at a demonstration in favour of the revival of the French law on secularism. After reminding people of the basic foundations of the republic, she said:

> *Today it is crucial for living together in our country to reaffirm the two principles of secularism and equality between sexes... The veil is not as they would like us to believe, a religious sign for Muslim women. This symbol of submission represents the seal of humiliation for women and the marker of a forever-minor status that they try to impose on women... Only a law that will reaffirm these two undissociable principles of secularism and equality between sexes will protect the girls of the suburbs and further protect the status of women*

Young women chose to expose themselves to the wrath of fundamentalist-inspired young men. They used the media and also lined up to testify in front of the Stasi Commission appointed by the government to evaluate the people's support for secularism. They denounced the meaning of the veil as well as other forms of discrimination women suffer under

fundamentalist rule in Muslim countries (Djavan, 2003). Meryem, 23, student in Paris, said:

> *The veil is meant to avoid provoking the desire of men. This is a way to alleviate their responsibility and to potentially charge us with guilt – I cannot accept that!*

Interestingly enough, because it was mainly school girls that were concerned, the rights of the girl child were central to the debate, not just women's rights. It is a fact that girls in present day fundamentalist contexts are veiled not just at puberty as was done traditionally but at an increasingly younger age, sometimes starting at age 2 or 3. This practice, which puts into such a young mind, through the symbol of the veil that her sexuality is bad and dangerous, that she will be responsible for men's sexual violence, cannot but have pernicious effects. Said Chadortt Djavann, Iranian writer exiled in France:

> *I am convinced that veiling minors should be forbidden in the whole of the country. In the name of equality between minors of all origins, religions and gender, I demand that the veil on minors, this veil that stigmatises their female sexuality, this veil whose scars they will bear throughout their lives, be considered as ill treatment.*

It is interesting to note that the transgression of the law on secularism started some fifteen years ago and that at the moment only 50 girls in the whole of France actually persist in going all the way to being expelled from school.

> ** *A survey done in November 2003 shows 1.7 million 'Muslim' women in France (one can presume that their religion has been abusively inferred from their origin): 49% are in favor of the law on secularism; 91 % feel that they are well integrated; and 86 % of women who live in France do not wear a head cover.*
>
> *Of total number, 30% of marriages are 'mixed marriages' with North Africans in France, compared to 2% with the Turkish minority in Germany or with South Asians in the UK.*

Since education is compulsory for all children under 16, parents then have an obligation to put them in private schools or give them private tuition. No girl is deprived of her right to education, as fundamentalist propaganda wants the world to believe.

Since the beginning of this action, Muslim fundamentalists received support from Jewish and Christian fundamentalist forces who seized this opportunity to regain a power they lost in 1906, as well as from the extreme right, such as the National Front led by Le Pen in France and the Freedom Party led by Haider in Austria. Extreme right fascist forces also support the concept of 'difference,' precisely because in their views, it legitimises racial inferiority. Let us not ever forget that the supporters of apartheid in South Africa, or the pro-slavery Southern States in the USA were staunch defenders of 'difference.'

France was also under heavy pressure from other European states that were pushing for multiculturalism. On two occasions the European Parliament nearly adopted provisions that would have put an end to French secularism: they wanted to inscribe Christianity in the Constitution, and a law on blasphemy.[4] At a time when France was isolated within Europe on the question of secularism and multiculturalism, she was attacked by left and anti-globalisation forces in the name of anti-racism, was taken to the European Court on Human Rights on behalf of veiled girls. At the moment when France appeared to be on the brink of finally succumbing to these pressures, one can say that the support to French secularism that came from women of migrant descent and their seizing of the media was a decisive factor in reviving the law.

For us women, the struggle is a matter of life and death. Behind these claims for specificities – which, are not limited to the veil in schools, there is the underlying demand of specific 'personal laws.' As we can see in

other countries, in Canada recently for example, introducing family laws that respect religious differences is the final target. This will mean for women of North African descent to lose the right to marry and to be given in marriage by a matrimonial tutor; to lose the right to initiate divorce for only husbands can inititate it; to lose custody of the children upon divorce; to go back to obedience to husbands; to have an unequal share to inheritance; etc. This is the goal of the fundamentalist forces in Europe. When coupled with the denial of the right to change religion or to declare no religion [in 1999, France failed to obtain recognition of these rights from the Union of Islamic Organisations of France (UOIF)], these provisions will then allow discrimination against female French citizens of 'Muslim' migrant descent, turning them into second class citizens that have less rights in family matters than other women citizens.

The 2005 Youth Riots in French Suburbs and Citizens' Responses

For over ten years, several times a year and symbolically on New Year Eve, underprivileged youth have set fire to symbols of a consumerist society. Hundreds of cars have been burnt each year and elite shops have been looted. It is only this year, following the veil controversy, that the international media gave so much attention to these events. France was portrayed as highly insecure although incidents took place mostly at night, perpetrated by small groups, and limited to specific areas around the main cities of France.

Indeed there were qualitative differences in what happened this time around. It lasted longer [three weeks, rather than a couple of days] and the magnitude of the degradations was significant: the youth did not just attack cars and shops, but buses, schools, community centers, sports

equipment, and police stations. However it can be noted that public transportation and police stations had been already attacked in the past. Nobody died, except at an accident that reportedly sparked the riot: two kids apparently afraid of a potential police control hid in an electric generator where they were electrocuted.

Police reaction and that of the Minister of Interior during the October riots raises a troubling issue where incidences could have been smashed in a couple of days, as has been done in previous years, with no bloodshed and a few young men briefly arrested, not even put to trial. However, the authorities deliberately let it grow. More cars were burnt later, on New Years Eve, as usual, and that was swiftly stopped the usual way. One suspects some strategy for the upcoming presidential elections of 2007, rather than any real difficulty in handling the situation.

This lack of adequate state reaction sparked new citizens' initiatives. Fathers and mothers stepped out of their homes in the evenings and camped inside the premises of buildings they wanted to protect, such as schools and other public equipment that benefit people. They stated that they were not there to replace the police but to show their presence as citizens. Groups of fathers took turns to walk the streets of affected areas, talking to the youth they met in the nights, explaining why they were opposed to the degradations. Mediators expressed the concerns of young rioters in the national media. Many of the youth angrily held their French national identity card to the cameras, asking why their lives were so miserable if they were nationals of this country.

Many parents, educators, mediators and other adults who stood vigil and undertook action to speak with the angry youth were of North African descent, but there was a fair mix of origins among the people that in

fact controlled the situation throughout the events. If boys from North African descent were a visible minority among the rioters, 'blacks' were also present, as well as 'white' French boys.

What united the youth was obviously the economic condition they live in, the high rate of unemployment and 'lack of future' as they say, as well as their revolt in the face of a consumerist society that marginalised them, while they are ideologically co-opted by it. What united the adults was the powerful feeling of belonging to this country, France, and the will to defend their rights as citizens, not as communities.

Citizens' initiatives did not stop with the end of the riots. Throughout the month of December, before the deadline for the establishment of electoral lists for the next presidential elections, numerous well-known artists and sport stars from North African descent took the floor in all the media, organised rallies in the suburbs to urge youths to put their names down on these lists, if they had not already done so. The message was clear: they should use their voting power to change their situations. Said Sihem, 28, multimedia conceptor in Paris:

> *Three years ago, I applied for French citizenship. It does not mean that I did not feel at home. But in very concrete terms, I could not vote, while i wanted my voice to be heard.*

As in the battle over secularism and the veil, women are taking a clear position, and in many instances taking the lead, in re-politicising the debate and de-ethnicising it. During the riots, women from North African descent initiated numerous dialogues with the rioters and with the representatives of the government and the mass media. They initiated protest marches. They participated, together with men, in the day and night occupation of public facilities to peacefully protect these from rioters.

Conclusion

While there is no denying that within a difficult global economic context, with France faced with serious unemployment, degradation of living conditions of the middle and lower middle classes, discrimination of nationals from migrant and especially North African descent, the question remains that of finding ways to address this situation.

Refusing to listen to the fundamentalist mermaids, women have taken a political stand in both these events: they will tackle political issues as citizens, not as members of a community. They will not swallow the policy of 'going back to our roots' [women into men's custody inside the homes] that fundamentalists are promoting as a solution to economic and social problems. They will not accept the idea that the French state should trade constitutional rights for keeping 'communities' at peace. The women see constitutional rights and French secularism as their best protection against extreme right religious groups, and they have been their best defenders.

Women have been active and visible. And one can only hope that their growing strength will force French and European states to stop considering male self-appointed religious leaders as the only legitimate representatives of the 'community' and to give in to their demands, at the cost of women's rights, and in the name of cultural and religious rights.

One can hope too, that their voices will finally be heard and convince the progressive forces that they are by no means 'islamophobic' when they oppose extreme right forces working under the guise of religion, and that they should challenge the fundamentalist monopoly over religion. We suggest that they give a platform to progressive theologians in Islam, women as well as men:

they will not defend the veiling of women as criterion of true faith. We also suggest that they give a voice to all those of us who have not chosen religion as a marker of our identity.

As for the social problems that France face, they should not, cannot be the task of the sole affected people of migrant descent to fight to change. The fight is for all citizens. Let us not forget how Hitler was brought to power. To a situation of oppression, there are various responses. Let us not unwittingly support responses from the extreme right, built on racism, difference, communalism and control of women.

These are the lessons French women of North African migrant descent have taught the world during these two crises situations. They have earned the right to be heard.

Will the world listen?

References

Bencheikh, S. (1998). *Mariane et le prophete – l'Islam dans la France laïque*. Paris: Grasset.

Djavan, C. (2003). *Bas les voiles*. Paris: Gallimard.

Pena Ruiz, H. (2005, October 27). *France: Secularity and the Republic*. In WLUML News and Views, Retrieved February 17, 2006, from <http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd%5B157%5D=x-157-406385>.

Endnotes

[1] *Suburbs, unlike in the US, house not the elites but the lumpen proletariat: unemployed and rejected sections of the French population (including gypsies, migrants and their descent).*

[2] *While the national rate of unemployment is 10%, one should add numerous part time jobs and temporary jobs that maintain people in very precarious economic situations.*

[3] *36% of all high school drop outs come from the suburbs.*

[4] *The Organisation of Islamic Countries [OIC] is at present, lobbying the UN for the adoption of a certain language, notably, the adoption of the concept of 'blasphemy' by the Human Rights Commission.*

52

About the Author

Marieme Hélie-Lucas is an Algerian sociologist and psychotherapist based in France who taught epistemology in the social sciences at the Algiers University from 1967 to 1980. She is founder of the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Law (WLUML), a network committed to strengthening women's individual and collective struggles for equality and their rights, particularly in Muslim contexts. Marieme served as WLUML's International Coordinator from 1984 to 2000 and is a discussant and analyst on issues of fundamentalism.

We! **Special Edition No. 1, 2005-2006**

BACKLASH AND RESISTANCE!

MILITARISM, RELIGION AND POWER

There's no doubt that the women's movements and other social movements have made tremendous gains towards achieving the ultimate goals of gender and social justice. However, neo-liberal and fundamentalist forces are equally hard at work—and in a more organised and systematic manner—trying to retract these gains.

Backlash and Resistance! the pilot edition of the theme-focused WE! that Isis will occasionally produce, attempts to provide an initial scanning of this emerging political landscape. Through news reports, it tackles the myriad ways in which various forms of fundamentalisms—including political and religious, cultural and ethnic, market fundamentalism, and militarism—impact on people, particularly on women's lives and bodies. The edition provides glimpses as well on how women's movements and other social movements are resisting and responding to these major challenges.

Download the newsletter at: <www.isiswomen.org>.

For more information on how to get print copies, write to:

Editorial Team
Isis International-Manila
PO Box 1837, Quezon City Main
Quezon City 1100, Philippines
Fax: (+632)924-1065
Email: <communications@isiswomen.org>

Isis International

Isis International-Manila is a feminist NGO dedicated to women's information and communication needs that advances women's rights, leadership and empowerment throughout Asia and the Pacific. It is committed to empowering women with adequate information, communication tools and networks that enable pro-active participation in global, regional and national development processes.

Isis-Manila promotes South-South and North-South dialogues to enhance diversity and collaborations within the global women's movement. Further, it aims to contribute to the growing social justice movement globally by challenging inequities, stereotypes and cultural and political homogenisation furthered by globalised media and ICTs.

Through its programmes and services, Isis-Manila offers spaces and channels to communicate, share information, exchange ideas and experiences and build networks for support and collective action.