Introduction

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The political context of the conference

In 1997, when the idea of convening an international conference on Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms was first mooted in the international coordination group of Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), religious and ethnic fundamentalist movements were already very powerful in many countries. In some, such as Iran and Serbia, they were in power. The thirty-five members of WLUML's coordination group, who come from eighteen countries, thought that analysing the nature of fundamentalist movements, and the 'warning signs' they give as their political projects rise in intensity, would benefit those of us in situations that have not (yet?) become acute. We thought such a conference would help us to develop effective strategies of resistance.

However, by the time the conference took place, in November 2002, the global political scene had changed quite dramatically. Not only had religious and ethnic 'fundamentalist' politics recognisably gained power in many more countries (including Nigeria and India), but also, under the guise of a 'global war against terrorism', a new leadership in Washington, DC, controlled by a fundamentalist Christian and nationalist movement, was taking social and political licence around the world. Globally the period since 2000 has seen civil and political rights taken away from larger and larger numbers of people, while the popular appeal of fundamentalist leaders everywhere has been growing. (However, the resistance movement against the Iraqi war might prove to be a beginning of some significant change.)

When the conference convened, it could no longer focus only on the warning signs of fundamentalisms. While some of the papers in this publication do analyse such warning signs retroactively, others describe on-going situations in the author's country, the growing power of fundamentalist movements there and the strategies used by such movements to increase that power. Yet other articles focus on specific strategies of resistance - political, legal, and cultural.

At the conclusion of this introduction, we sum up what we consider to be the most important insights concerning warning signs and strategies of resistance that emerged from the conference. What we would like to do at this point, however, is to focus on those questions which the authors did not have space to consider at length but which are much debated among all of us working on these issues, namely:

1. What are fundamentalist movements, and what are the conditions that encourage their growth and durability?
2. Is it useful to speak of 'fundamentalism', or indeed 'fundamentalisms'? Are there alternative terms that would be more appropriate? What are the boundaries of the phenomenon we are discussing in this publication - does it concern only religious movements, or ethnic and national movements? What about neo-liberalism? Is this a form of fundamentalism?
3. What are the ways in which 'fundamentalisms' influence and determine gender relations?

What are fundamentalist movements?

Fundamentalist movements are political movements with religious, ethnic, and/or nationalist imperatives. They construct a single version of a collective identity as the only true, authentic and valid one, and use it to impose their power and authority over 'their' constituency (which varies from a particular community to most, if not all, of humanity). They usually claim to be the representatives of authentic tradition, and they speak against the corrupting influence of modernity and 'the West' (which non-westerners tend to regard as the same thing). However, fundamentalists are far from being pre-modern. In order to promote their project, they use all modern technological means available, from the media to weaponry. Furthermore, the vision they conjure up is a constructed and selective vision, rather than a revival of something in the past.

Beyond this common ground, which virtually always locates them on the extreme right of the political spectrum, fundamentalist projects can be very different from each other. They can use holy texts or rely upon experiential epiphanies and be linked with specific charismatic leaderships; they can appear as a form of traditional orthodoxy or, on the other hand, as a revivalist radical phenomenon fighting against traditional corrupt leaderships.

The recent rise of fundamentalist movements is linked to different facets of the crisis of modernity (broadly characterised as the attempt to build and maintain social order based on the principles of the Enlightenment - rationalism and progress). After a period of optimism following the Second World War, when the global South gained political independence from the colonial masters, it became clear to people all over the world that neither capitalism, communism nor nationalism were fulfilling their material, emotional and spiritual needs. The accompanying feelings of despair and disorientation sharpened with the demise of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the growing hegemony of neo-liberal globalisation.

There has been a miserable failure in many parts of the world to prevent a further widening of the yawning gap between rich and poor, to provide jobs for the burgeoning numbers of the unemployed, to stop the corruption that fosters disillusionment throughout society, and to provide the basic social services, such as health and education, that are essential to a decent life. This has been accompanied by the formal abdication, by many states, of their obligation to meet the basic needs of their citizens. At the same time, however, there has been an aggressive assertion of the state's control over society: democratic rights and freedoms have been repressed, not only to ensure the state's grip on power, but also to fulfill obligations outlined in the new trade, finance and re-structuring agreements to which governments have signed up. In some instances there has been a formal liberalisation in the political arena, but without any possibility of restructuring (let alone fulfilling) state obligations. The growing sense of insecurity that results from the locus of decision making shifting further and further away from people, and the deepening poverty that widens divisions between haves and have-nots and fuels competition for limited resources, push people into finding new ways of coping.

Chief amongst these coping mechanisms is the rise of collective identities defined by religion, ethnicity or culture, each projecting itself as the only way to protect its (willing or unwilling) members and gain access for them to power and resources. As Manuel Castells argues,[1] in times where people stop being sure that they will be able to continue to live where they live, with their family, doing the work they do, they turn to what he calls 'defensive identity communities', which are constructed as primordial and unchanging. Religions provide people with a compass and an anchor. Ethnic nationalisms provide them with fixed identities and impermeable community boundaries.

This puts great pressure on people to accept ever more narrow definitions of self; as a result, their multiple, non-antagonistic identities based on gender, citizenship, class, religion or ethnicity are reduced to one single, homogenised identity. Thence there is an intensification and creation of divisiveness within civil society, both between such groups, and against people who refuse to accept the identities imposed by ethnic, nationalistic, sectarian and religiously defined politics. Those groups involved in identity politics who push their agendas through force (including armed violence, acid throwing, anthrax threats, etc.), pose an ominous threat to society.

The religious right is increasingly playing a crucial role in identity politics everywhere – as is evident from the papers in this publication. The linkages that exist amongst politico-religious groups, and between them and various other right-wing forces, from the local to the international levels, both within given countries and communities and outside them, are increasingly clear - for instance, the Vatican, Syria and Iran have voted consistently on the same side in international forums, from the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1995, to Beijing+5 in 2000. It is also increasingly clear that there are links between mainstream politico-religious groups of the right and the extremist groups (whether spawned by them or not), which work strategically to reinforce each other in pursuit of their common ends, even when these links are denied.

Fundamentalist movements often stoke each other's fires, either through collaboration or through confrontation. Nira Yuval-Davis' paper, for example, points out how American Christian fundamentalists support fundamentalist Jewish settlers on the West Bank, colluding to serve their separate messianic - and ultimately conflicting - projects. On the other hand, in the context of ethnic or religious conflict, the dominance of fundamentalist movements on one side contributes directly to the strengthening of fundamentalist movements on the other. This we see in situations such as India, where the power of Hindu fundamentalist groups to spark communal violence, described in Chayanika Shah's paper, ultimately fuels fundamentalist positions within the Muslim community as well.

It is important to emphasise that, although in the South and among racialised minorities in the North, the hope is that fundamentalist movements will also solve their economic problems and their growing poverty, the impulse to join fundamentalist movements relates simultaneously to the above existential issues. This is clear when one sees that many of the followers of fundamentalist movements such as *Al-Qaeda* are middle class educated

male youth. Probably even more importantly, the spread of fundamentalist movements is not limited to the South or to southern groupings in the North. The spread of Christian fundamentalist movements in the US and extreme nationalist right-wing political movements throughout the West is also based on the need for defensive identity communities. Benefiting economically from globalisation does not prevent people from feeling deep anxiety and fear about their individual and collective security and morality in what may seem a disintegrating social world.

Are 'fundamentalism' and 'fundamentalisms' appropriate terms?

Much of the discussion concerning fundamentalism has focused on the question of whether to use the term at all, and if one does, what social movements to include under this umbrella.

Some[2] contest the use of the term at all, arguing that in practice it has become a form of racist abuse against Muslims, and is part of the global 'clash of civilizations' discourse.

Others point out that as the term originally emerged in relation to American conservative Protestants at the beginning of the twentieth century, it should be applied exclusively to Christians.[3] As Ayesha Imam has argued elsewhere,[4] applying the term to Muslims may miss the target politically, since many conservative Muslims - who are not politically affiliated with what are known as 'fundamentalist movements' - have no objection to being named as concerned with the 'fundamentals', or 'roots', of their faith.

At the same time, others (like the World Social Forum and DAWN - Development of Alternatives with Women for a New Era[5]) contend that not only religious and ethnic political movements should be included under this umbrella, but also neo-liberal globalisation, which, they argue, is a political-economic movement that represents itself as obeying immutable truths about 'the market' which cannot be challenged or resisted.

We are aware of the problematic nature of the term 'fundamentalism', and for several years have used 'fundamentalisms' instead, to signal our awareness of the heterogeneity of the political movements covered by this umbrella term. Heterogeneity - and this is of vital importance - exists not only between religions and ethnicities but also inside them, emphasising different texts and/or experiential practices, contesting who is a 'true' member of the collectivity. Nonetheless, while flagging the difficulties, we continue to speak of 'fundamentalism' because there has not been an alternative term that covers the same range of political and social phenomena and intuitively conveys the message.

At the same time, we do not include neo-liberalism or other economic movements under the same umbrella. We accept that descriptively there might be a case for doing so, and this has proved to be a useful mobilising tool (as in the video presented at the Porto Alegre World Social Forum). But when we try to deal with the phenomenon analytically, not just descriptively, religious and ethnic fundamentalist movements fall under the same family of defensive identity-politics mass movements (which we described above); the economic movements do not.

How do 'fundamentalisms' define appropriate gender relations?

As the articles in this collection show,[6] feminists have had particular concerns when it comes to fundamentalist movements. Although many women take part in fundamentalist movements, and some find them empowering, overall, fundamentalist politics tend to constitute a threat to women's freedom and autonomy and often their lives. Gender relations in general, and women in particular, are often used to symbolise the collectivity, its 'culture and tradition', its boundaries and its future reproduction. For this reason, women tend to bear the brunt of identity politics in terms of control of their life choices; they are made to follow 'authentic' notions of identity and behaviour. Definitions of collective identity are increasingly hinged on definitions of gender, so that the construction of a 'Muslim woman', a 'Christian woman' or a 'Hindu woman' is therefore integral to the construction of 'Muslimness', 'Christianity' or 'Hinduism'; this explains in part the emphasis on controlling women's sexuality and other aspects of their lives. Armed groups in many countries specifically target women in situations of conflict, e.g. rape is used as a tool of ethnic or religious 'cleansing'. A general brutalisation of people contributes to increasing violence against women in all spheres of life; this is facilitated by easy access to the means of violence (be it arms, anthrax or acid), and manipulation of the law.

Control over sexuality is a central theme of the social programmes promoted by fundamentalist movements everywhere. It has also been a painfully visible element in recent armed conflicts, where mass rapes and forced pregnancies are deliberately designed to rob women of control over their sexuality and their reproductive capacity. Closely linked with the issue of control over sexuality is the imposition of dress codes. Although frequently justified as either 'religiously correct' or 'traditional', the newly imposed dress code is often in fact alien to the particular context, whether the attempt be to introduce Iran-style chadors in Sudan or increasingly strict body-covering for some groups of Jewish women in New York.

Religious right movements, from the United States to Afghanistan to Austria, tend to have a remarkable consistency of vision regarding gender relations and sexuality. Commonalities include: asceticism; a focus on women's sexuality as a source of immorality (which necessitates the denial to women and girls of knowledge about and access to fertility management, especially abortion); the increase in means for men to satisfy heterosexual desire and strengthen their control over the family; and the reconstruction of patriarchal controls over women and their sexuality, with women constructed primarily as the domestic mother and wife, subordinate to men.[7] A concern to prohibit all non-male-dominant heterosexual forms of sexuality is universally present in fundamentalisms, thus also prohibiting gay, lesbian or trans-gender sexuality. Anisa de Jong's paper documents attacks on gay and lesbian people for their sexuality.

The above is not contradicted by the fact that in recent years, especially in multi-cultural western societies, some fundamentalist leaderships have used the 'women's question' in order to present themselves as liberal forces. As described by Gita Sahgal in this publication, such organisations try to legitimise themselves as representatives of their communities in

their diasporic locations by co-opting feminist demands from members of their religious or ethnic and national groupings. This does not stop them from continuing to support and promote extremely oppressive policies in their countries of origin.

Warning signs of fundamentalisms and how fundamentalisms work

This last point brings us to the primary question which motivated the conference and this publication. As the different contributors to the volume show - especially Louisa Ait Hamou on Algeria, Ziba Mir-Hosseini on Iran, and Nahda Younis Shehada on Palestinian communities - the warning signs are there, to observe and resist. But they are often ignored for the sake of national and religious unity, or dismissed as a passing fad. In each of these cases, flirting by secular political groups with religious right groups - each trying to use the other for political influence - has strengthened the religious right. As has so often been pointed out (and ignored), it is usually women's interests that are sacrificed in this political power play. Sanusi Lamido Sanusi's paper on Nigeria serves as a warning that religiously-inspired legislation is not necessarily the result of a religious right political group, but once initiated, it strengthens both religious conservatism and fundamentalist groups and tendencies.

Chayanika Shah's paper on Hindu fundamentalism in India demonstrates how Hindu nationalist movements have falsified history to represent the Hindu majority - themselves migrants to the region - as indigenous inhabitants victimised over centuries by 'invaders'. Elfriede Harth, looking at a variety of Christian fundamentalist groups in the USA, analyses their success in using religion to occupy political space, thereby undermining the authority of democratic systems which work through public discourse. Zainah Anwar's paper on Muslim fundamentalism in Malaysia shows similar discursive strategies there, and, more specifically, how religious right groups operate to elude and elide the public dialogue over legislation formally required in democratic systems. Stasa Zajovic's paper documents the increasing dominance in public discourses in the former Yugoslavia of clerical nationalism (of both the Serbian Orthodox Church and Muslim leaders) and their increasing influence via the media and in schools, with the de-secularisation of the state and, as in India, the rewriting of history.

A crucial moment tends to come when fundamentalist movements enter the public sphere and gain state and media power through their claims for authenticity and legitimacy as the moral voice of the collectivity. A key target for discrimination and abuse in the name of protecting morality are gay, lesbian and trans-gender people, as de Jong's paper demonstrates.

The chances of success of the fundamentalist project become high when other sectors of the religious, cultural and political spectrum collude with the claims of the fundamentalists. Tazeen Murshid comments that use of the media enabled the Bangladeshi religious right to demonise Taslima Nasrin and others (though the media were also the means by which the cases were internationalised). Also with regards to Bangladesh, Sara Hossain analyses how demands for changes in the judicial system, as well as manipulating public opinion, are crucial tools for the religious right to silence any expression of difference and dissent – and what this means in terms of activist strategies. Amie Bojang Sissoho draws a link between

the increasing prominence of fundamentalist views, especially in the state-owned Gambian media, and the views of the present incumbent of State House. She describes how the State House *Imam*, whose Friday sermons are broadcast, regularly inveighs against contraception and campaigns to stop Female Genital Mutilation.

Another area of combat is education. Given its crucial role in shaping the minds of young people, as well as training them for particular social and economic roles, this is a particular focus of attention for fundamentalist organisations. Struggles over curricula are common, whether fundamentalist Christian campaigns against the teaching of evolution in the USA, or over sex education, from the USA to Algeria and Nigeria. Niloufar Pourzand's paper describes the sexist and militarist nature of textbooks in Afghanistan, even before the advent of the Taliban. Thus it is important to monitor not only school curricula and the nature of textbooks used in schools, but also the ways teachers work with students.

Women's strategies of resistance

During the conference, the participants discussed strategies of resistance in several different spheres: education, law, the media and obviously, political organisations. Clearly women's strategies of resistance should vary, just as the local situations in which they confront fundamentalist powers vary. A central question in this respect is whether the resistance should always be carried out within secular and pluralist spaces, or whether there can be modes of resistance which operate even when such spaces have already disappeared from the public arena.

Nora Murat describes the strategy of working from within Muslim discourses that is being used to spectacular effect by Sisters in Islam in Malaysia. Ayesha Imam writes about the multi-pronged strategy adopted by BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights in Nigeria: one part focuses primarily on Muslim communities and within Muslim discourses; another aims at bridging the divides between and among Muslim and other communities, and developing mutual solidarity and support through struggling to arrive at shared understandings and critiques, common objectives and strategies. At the same time, BAOBAB insists on the right to participate in the continuous development of international human rights constructions.

At the other end of the spectrum, Louisa Ait Hamou's documentation of resistance to Muslim fundamentalism in Algeria focuses solely on secular forms of resistance. Nadje Al-Ali, analysing secular women in Egypt, points out that 'secularism only provides a very broad umbrella under which a variety of discourses, practices and concepts may be accommodated, some reiterating old truths, others breaking with rigid paradigms'. As Al-Ali's paper concludes, those women (whether Jewish women in Israel, or Muslim women in Nigeria and Egypt) 'who challenge fundamentalists not only with respect to their conceptualisation of secularism, but also with respect to their reification of "authentic culture" … are simultaneously positioned at the margin of prevailing political culture and at the centre of the *avant-garde* which is attempting to challenge existing political structures and discourses'.

When we discuss strategies of resisting fundamentalisms, many issues, both local and global, emerge. There is a need to operate on both levels, but also to try and coordinate and link the two. This does not mean imposing a specific global agenda on local struggles - they have to determine their own priorities - but there needs to be a sharing of values and overall goals and a sense of mutual support. Similarly, there is a specific role for anti-fundamentalist women's organisations, but they have to work in the context of, and in co-operation with, wider political forces with similar goals.

One of the difficulties of anti-fundamentalist political work is that often, especially to people from the West, such work seems to go against rights of cultural and religious freedom. There needs to be much more attention to work which highlights both the contested nature of cultures and traditions, and the specific political projects with specific political leaderships that benefit from constructing those 'cultures and traditions' in ways that suit their goals.[8] Chayanika Shah's paper on India exemplifies the Hindu fundamentalists' strategy of creating the leitmotif of a victimised Hinduism, which appeals even to groups that have been excluded or oppressed by dominant Hinduism. Shah also alerts us to what happens when a fundamentalist group gains power - even by democratic means. As she shows, 'democratic power in the hands of fundamentalist groups threatens and oppresses all those it "otherises" in a manner that sounds the death knell, not only for their citizenship rights, but also for the basic tenets of democracy itself'.

Paradoxically, since 9-11 there has been more space to highlight the role of non-state fundamentalist organisations; but it is imperative to be vigilant, and not be co-opted to political agendas that use fundamentalist and terrorist activities as an excuse to racialise, and abuse the human rights of, Muslims and other non-Christians in the West.

This raises the question of how much activists need to invest in working with the United Nations and other international human rights organisations. These are important forums, but it is also important not to fall into the habit of producing documentation for its own sake, as a sort of fetish rather than a guide to action, nor to let such activities suck in all the energies of grass-roots movements. In this light, Nahda Younis Shehada's paper on the Model Parliament in Palestine discusses a creative way of moving women's issues out of the margins and into the mainstream of national concerns.

The media have an even more general impact than education. Fundamentalist organisations often use sophisticated media to spread their word, which have become big business. In addition, there is a large number of websites through which they spread information and co-ordinate activities transnationally. The appendix compiled by Harsh Kapoor illustrates some of the websites run by fundamentalists and the far right. To the extent that it is possible, anti-fundamentalist activists need to develop their own counter media, and create websites in which clarity of message, credibility based on local participating groups and concrete suggestions for action should prevail.

A basic issue is how to structure anti-fundamentalist activities in efficient yet democratic and accountable ways, sensitive to local needs yet supported by global networks which are anti-fundamentalist but also anti-racist, inclusive and yet targeted. In the Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms conference in London, all these issues were raised, but more work needs to be done.

Conclusion

Obviously, in such a publication we can only raise some of the main issues that relate to the ways fundamentalist projects should be understood and resisted. While networks such as WLUML, Catholics For A Free Choice and Women Against Fundamentalisms have campaigned for a number of years against fundamentalist movements locally and globally, it is only recently that concern about fundamentalisms has come to the top of the agenda for global social movements and organisations like the Global Social Forum and the Association of Women in Development (AWID). Those of us who have campaigned against fundamentalisms for many years have always felt that we were fighting on all fronts at the same time - both against people within, and people hostile to, our own communities - but this pressure has grown considerably since 9-11. The global 'war against terrorism' has legitimised the restriction of liberty everywhere, and is used as cover for the neo-imperial aspirations of the US in a post cold war world driven by notions of the 'clash of civilisations'.

Anti-fundamentalist campaigners have called for many years for the activities of fundamentalist movements to be stopped, detrimental as they are to human rights in general and women's rights in particular (even when these movements are not (yet) in government). This has run against the 'common sense' represented in the jurisprudence of international law, which conflated the political sphere to the state governmental sphere and could not recognise any other political agent than the state as responsible for atrocities that took place in their countries, whether or not governments were willing or able to control them. After 9-11 there has finally been recognition of movements such as the notorious *Al-Qaeda*.

However, while some of the steps taken to control the funding, and the free movement of supporters, of such organisations, are to be welcomed, this gain has been lost in a situation which criminalises all political dissenting voices. The inability of certain states to control fundamentalist movements within their borders has become an excuse for others to invade and occupy the country (as happened in Afghanistan), with some leading human rights 'experts', like Michael Ignatieff,[9] lending active support.

We do not share such a perspective. While most of the papers in this collection deal with fundamentalist movements in the South, we also point out the collusion of the extreme political right with fundamentalist movements in the West as well, particularly in the USA. What we are lacking here - and this should be the task of a future conference and further publications - is research into the ways fundamentalist politics operate in the international and global arena, and the ways women's groups and organisations strategise against them.

Endnotes

[1] Manuel Castells (1996-8) *The Information Age: Economy, Society, Culture*, 3 vols, Oxford: Blackwell.

[2] See Tariq Modood (1992) 'British Asian Muslims and the Rushdie Affair', in *'Race', Culture and Difference*, London: Sage Publications; and Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1998) ' "Fundamentalism" and the American Security Discourse', paper presented at a seminar on fundamentalism at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.

[3] Kenneth Leech (2002) 'The Rise of Christian fundamentalism', and Arun Kundnani (2002) 'An unholy alliance? Racism, religion and communalism', in *CARF* No. 67, Summer, special issue, 'Fundamentalisms'.

[4] Ayesha M. Imam (1997) 'The Muslim Religious Right ("Fundamentalists") and Sexuality', WLUML Dossier; abridged and reprinted in (1997) *Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights Newsletter*, 60, No.4; reprinted in Pinar Ilkkaracan (ed., 2000) *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Countries*, Istanbul: WWHR/KHIP; revised and reprinted in Patricia Beattie Young, Mary E. Hunt and Rashika Balakrishnan (eds, 2001) *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

[5] See, for example, Guacira C. de Oliveira (2003) 'Against Fundamentalisms', on *www.mujeresdelsur.org.uy/libro_camp/libro_ing7.htm*; and Gita Sen and Bene Madunagu (2001) 'Between Globalisation and Fundamentalism -- Gender Justice in the Cairo+5 and Beijing+5 Reviews', *DAWN Informs*, November.

[6] See also Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis (2001[1992]) *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain*, London: WLUML (orginally published by Virago); and *www.wluml.org* and *waf.gn.apc.org*.

[7] Imam (1997), ibid.

[8] Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) *Gender and Nation*, London: Sage Publications.

[9] Michael Ignatieff (2001) *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.