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News from around the world, WLUML is an international network that provides information, solidarity and support for all women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam.

**Women Living Under Muslim Laws at the 11th AWID International Forum
 Common goals, Different strategies**

From 14 to 17 November 2008, over 1500 women's rights advocates and activists from around the globe converged on Cape Town, South Africa, at the 11th AWID International Forum. The four day Forum was held at the Cape Town International Convention Center, in addition to a multitude of formal and informal parallel meetings held by participants.

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international membership organization that works to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women. The Forum is designed to be "both a conference and a call to action" and is the largest recurring event of its kind.

The theme of the 2008 Forum was "The Power of Movements", and additional efforts were made to better integrate young women and/or women from marginalized communities. WLUML brought an unprecedentedly large delegation of 32 participants to this Forum, including participants from Algeria, Bahrain, Canada, France, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, the UK and the US.



The WLUML network's theme was *Women Living Under Muslim Laws: Common Goals, Different Strategies* and under this banner sessions were held to discuss various strategies employed by networkers in their struggles for social justice, gender equality, and women's empowerment in their own contexts. Two formal panel sessions were held: "Religious (Re) Interpretation for Social Justice: Emerging Feminist Voices in Islam" and "Why Secularism is a Women's Issue." A roundtable discussion focused on WLUML's complementary objectives and strategies with interested participants. An audio-visual performance of the "Great Ancestors: Twelve Centuries of Women Asserting Rights in Muslim Contexts" recounted the words and deeds of empowered women and feminists in Muslim communities over the centuries. Throughout the four days of the Forum, WLUML also hosted two campaign stalls in the main thoroughfare of the venue, highlighting the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women! and the campaign for women's access to sporting events in Iran.

In addition to these six WLUML- organized events, networkers also used the opportunity of the Forum to actively participate in four days of plenary speeches, interactive sessions, workshops, debates, conversations, and creative sessions generating powerful discussions on gender equality and women's human rights. Informal networking between new and long-standing allies also played a key role, with networkers engaged in caucuses, parallel events, public demonstrations, talking with the media, artistic and well-being activities, and one-to-one conversations. The Forum created a tangible and conducive space for linking networkers at the global level who may not otherwise have engaged with each other's local contexts and struggles.

The WLUML delegation represented an incredibly diverse range of geographical locations, cultural contexts, professions, ages, and areas of interest and expertise. The responses after the Forum were overwhelmingly positive, one founding member of the network said "I met all of you after a very long time and that was indeed wonderful, it gives one a lot of hope for the future with all the dynamism around." A newer networker reported back: "The experience was a real privilege and felt to me like 'a chance in a lifetime'; to be in Cape Town to witness such loud and proud resistance to a myriad of repressive regimes and regressive trends, was proof for me that these are very daunting, but encouraging times for feminists all over the world."

The personal and political connections that were forged and renewed at the AWID Forum are invaluable. They will certainly continue to sustain our collective endeavours while strengthening and expanding our global network of women to advance, protect and promote women's human rights.

Aisha Shaheed



EDITORIAL & SOLIDARITY

Solidarity

UPDATE: Algeria: Samia Smets acquitted

30/10/2008: Samia Smets, accused of having damaged a Qur'an and sentenced last September to 10 years imprisonment, was acquitted on 28 October 2008 by the judge of the criminal division of the Court of Biskra, Algeria.

Bahrain: Harassment of women's human rights defender

26/01/2009: On 17 January 2009 it was reported that Ghada Jamsheer, a woman human rights defender in Bahrain, had become the target of a harassment campaign. Ghada Jamsheer and her family have received threats, including many threatening text messages, and have been followed in a car. During her time at the AWID Forum, officials reportedly entered her home and took photographs. A collective letter has been issued by WLUML on her behalf endorsed by leading women's and mainstream human rights organisations.

UPDATE: Canada: Canadian polygamist leader arrested

13/01/2009: A leader of the polygamous community of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) - a dissident branch of Mormonism - who has admitted having numerous wives and dozens of children was arrested on 7 January 2009 in western Canada. He was charged with practicing polygamy, according to court documents and local officials. In July 2008, WLUML wrote to the Canadian government denouncing the fact that under the clause of 'religious freedoms', the practices of forced and underage marriages, incest, and abuse have been permitted to continue in this community.

France: Ensure police protection for Mohamed Sifaoui

11/08/2008: Mohamed Sifaoui - an Algerian journalist, writer and director living in exile in France - was violently attacked by Islamists in Paris on 13 June 2008 for his tireless and courageous struggle against fundamentalisms and his defence of secularism. Since 2003 he had benefited from police protection, but it was withdrawn in January 2008.

Kurdistan: Woman stoned to death for eloping

17/06/2008: Kurdistan Aziz was 16 years old when she eloped with a man she knew her family would not accept. Although a local woman's organisation concerned for her safety alerted the authorities in the Governate of Sulemaniya, controlled by the PUK, they refused to intervene in a 'tribal issue' and asked the women's organisation to risk their own safety to provide a photograph of her. Between 17 and 18 May 2008, Kurdistan Aziz was stoned to death by her relatives.

UPDATE: Nigeria: Women's groups protest bill on 'indecent clothing'

8/08/2008: BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights issued an alert in June 2007 regarding the "Bill for an Act to Prohibit and Punish Public Nudity, Sexual Intimidation and Other Related Offences in Nigeria". If made into law, this bill would regulate women's clothing and civic liberties under the guise of 'protection'. In July a coalition of women's rights activists intervened in a Public Hearing on the proposed bill which has, for the time being, not been passed into law.

Somalia: Stoning to death of a 13-year old girl

4/11/2008: 13-year-old Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow was killed on 27 October 2008, by a group of 50 men who stoned her to death in a stadium in the southern port of Kismayu, Somalia, in front of around 1,000 spectators. She was accused of in breach of Islamic law but her father and other sources told Amnesty International that she had in fact been raped by three men, and had attempted to report this rape to the al-Shabab militia who control Kismayu, and it was this act that resulted in her being accused of adultery and detained. None of men she accused of rape were arrested.

For further information visit our website at:

www.wluml.org/english/news.shtm

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Editorial

Dewenati! Buon anno! كل عام وأنتم بخيرا! , Nyal saal Mubarak! Gott Nytt År! Selamat Tahun Baru! שנה טובה! Heri za Mwaka Mpya! ! نوى كمال مو مبارك ش! , Barka da sabuar shekara! Suba aluth avuruddak! Bonne et heureuse année ! Happy New Year 2009!

Our best wishes for health and happiness from Fatou, Aisha, Anthonia, Chiara, Elly, Johanna, Faizun and many volunteers with whom we share the International Coordination Office of Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML-ICO). We could have used further languages to signify the extent and richness of our network.

2008 was a fruitful year in which we consolidated the results of our transition period thanks to our collective efforts. We were able to strengthen our team through the promotion of Aisha Lee Shaheed to the position of Deputy Coordinator, the appointment of Eleanor Kilroy, as Communication & Information Dissemination Officer, and Johanna Heden as Programme Assistant.

We have continued our solidarity and campaign activities according to shared concerns in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. We contributed to the efforts of our Sudanese sisters' organisations in their Campaign to Reform Rape Laws to be launched on 31 January 2009 in Khartoum. We have likewise collaborated with Nigerian organisations in their struggle against repressive legislation on 'indecent clothing' and homosexual and transsexual rights. It was also a great pleasure for us to accompany Cherifa Kheddar, President of *Djazairouna*, as she received the International Service Human Rights Award for the defence of women's rights on December 2008 in the House of Commons in London.

The 11th AWID International Forum, in Cape Town, South Africa, was a culminating moment in which the network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, demonstrated a strong presence. At its six sessions, WLUML brought together over 30 networkers of different ages, professions, nationalities, and from different regions, to represent the extent of its diversity, the reality of its intergenerational relationships, and its commitment to strengthening the power of movements around the theme: 'Common goals, Different strategies'.



L—R Top: Samia Allalou, Faizun Zackariya, Roya Rahmani, Homa Hoodfar, Fatou Sow, Codou Bop, Anthonia Onwardi. Bottom: Asma'u Joda, Shadi Sadr, Ayesha Imam, Farida Shaheed, Cassandra Balchin, Fahima Hashim. ©WLUML

One of the year's best pieces of news, in October, was the allocation of a grant that allows the WLUML network and the Institute of Women's Empowerment to commence a three-year collective project entitled **Women reclaiming and re-defining cultures: Asserting rights over body, self and public spaces**. Sexuality, violence against women, and property rights will be the main concerns of the project.

Good luck to everyone!

Fatou Sow

WLUML-ICO Coordinator

CAMPAIGNS

Cherifa Kheddar Receives Human Rights Award

Women Living Under Muslim Laws is delighted to announce that Cherifa Kheddar received the Award for the Defence of the Human Rights of Women at a ceremony in the House of Commons, London, in December 2008.

The Award is one of the five Human Rights Awards issued by the International Service each year, in which grassroots organisations, workers and activists who work for change at local, national or international level are recognised for their promotion of human rights and for effecting real change in the lives of people.



Cherifa Kheddar and award presenter John Snow.

in particular, women who were viewed as not complying with traditional gender roles were systematically attacked and thousands of women were assassinated, raped, tortured, abducted or forced into hiding. For this reason, Ms Kheddar has always labelled the civil war a 'war on civilians'.

Cherifa Kheddar runs a campaign against the law on national reconciliation under which all crimes have been pardoned without any form of investigation or naming of the perpetrators. Ms Kheddar has undertaken pioneering work in advocating for transitional justice, bringing together women from different backgrounds and political opinions in opposition to this law.



Fatou Sow, Cherifa Kheddar, and Aisha Shaheed at the reception before the award ceremony at the House of Commons, London.
© WLUML

WLUML congratulate Cherifa Kheddar for winning this award, and we wish her all the best in the future!

Johanna Heden

Cherifa Kheddar is the President of *Djazairouna* ("Our Algeria") – an association of victims of terrorism. As a human rights activist, Ms. Kheddar actively supports the dependants of the almost 200,000 people who were killed during the Algerian civil war, or – as the civil war is often referred to – the Dark Decade of Algeria. Most of the victims were men, leaving behind almost a generation of women. Ms. Kheddar supports dependants through long administrative procedures, accompanying them to identify corpses of loved ones on the occasion of the discovery of a mass grave, and provides emotional and psychological help to traumatized people, as well as legal aid to help dependants register their stories and in doing so, slowly to overcome their trauma.

Many of the female survivors from this Dark Decade were subjected to violence and discrimination during the civil war when fundamentalists and their armed insurgency groups enforced a gender apartheid,

Four of the five award winners gathering outside the House of Commons:

L-R: Christopher Mulenga, John Snow, Cherifa Kheddar, Asipa Musaeva, and Moses Zulu
© WLUML



CHAY Magazine

Pakistani **Chay Magazine**, founded summer 2008, discusses issues of sex and sexuality. The founders of Chay Magazine noted in Pakistani society a "disturbing tendency towards fear and shame around issues of sex and sexuality - that is to say, around a normal human interaction" and seek to bring these topics into public discourse. They say: "The taboo and silence around sex and sexuality are oppressive on all of us, irrespective of gender, and lead, at the very least, to unhappiness in our daily lives and, more often, to violence, shame, depression, ill health and general social malaise. We at Chay Magazine endeavour to bring to the Pakistani reading public a place to converse about those things we are most shy of. Our hope is that, through this, we can become braver and stronger, more powerful, self-assured, and just and fair members of society".

Currently, the website and blog of Chay Magazine are run entirely by a team of dedicated volunteers and are actively seeking support for their endeavours.

To donate or learn more, you can visit www.chaymagazine.org

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND ACTIVISM AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

PAKISTAN: Activists respond to women buried alive; no cultural justifications for murder!

On 2 September 2008, a demonstration, organised by women's human rights activists, was held in front of Karachi Press Club. The aim of the protest was to condemn the brutal killing of five women, of which three, aged between 16 and 18 years, were buried alive.

The protestors carried placards with slogans such as 'Stop killing women', 'Murder is no custom' and 'No honour killing', to denounce the statements of the Senator of Balochistan province, Israrullah Zehri, who justified the killings by saying it was part of their 'tribal custom'.



Thomas Hawk. Source: www.flickr.com

The incident occurred in a remote village of Jafarabad district, Baba Kot, 300 kilometres away from the capital of Balochistan province. Mr. Abdul Sattar Umrani, the brother of the provincial minister and leader of the ruling party (PPP), and other influential people, have been accused of being involved in this heinous crime.

However, when the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRIC), contacted the provincial minister Mr. Sadiq Umrani, he denied any involvement. Nonetheless, the provincial government has been accused of trying to silence the issue.

There are several individuals and organisations condemning the crime, and demanding punishment for those involved. Maulana Ghafoor Haideri, of the JUI-F, points out that there is no tradition of burying women alive in Baloch society since it is against Islam's teachings. Jamal Leghari of PML-Q agrees, adding that the Baloch people do not believe in such punishments. Furthermore, the leader of the Opposition, Kamil Ali Agha, has accused the Balochistan government of ignoring the incident. He clarified that no *jirga* ("grand council") could ever sentence someone to be buried alive, and there is no law that allows anyone committing such crime to go unpunished. He urged the government to prosecute the people involved.

**"[...] the Talibanisation project aim[s] at absolute power that suffocates women. This denies rights and further narrows the spaces guaranteed for women by the Pakistan state in 1947."
[Women's Action Forum (WAF) Press Release on the murders in Balochistan]**

The Women's Action Forum (WAF) expressed their deep concern in a press release on the case. WAF demanded that all perpetrators in this crime be caught and punished, and the leaders of the Umrani tribe be held accountable. WAF also urged the Pakistani state and its representatives to take responsibility in order to 'ensure that such inhuman, cruel and criminal actions never take place again'. They stated violence in the pursuit of power has become a norm in Pakistan and its attacks have targeted individual women as well as groups.

Sources: The News International, Dawn, WAF Press Release

IRAN: Women successfully lobby government to reform family law

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) welcomes the news that Iranian lawmakers have amended a contentious new family law bill, marking a major victory for Iranian women's rights activists.

What was the content of the proposed law?

Article 23: Would make polygamy easier for Iranian men. Currently, an Iranian man needs to obtain the permission of his first wife in order to marry a second. This safeguard would be effectively removed for women.

Article 25: Would have taxed women's *mehr*, a monetary sum given by the groom to the bride, which is often considered a protection for women against arbitrary divorce by their husbands.

When the bill was brought before Parliament and before the vote took place, one hundred women's rights defenders stormed the Parliament building to register their protest to lawmakers. Because mass demonstrations by women often result in arrests, the women entered in groups of three or four until they presented themselves en masse to voice their criticism of the new bill.

Women from various backgrounds, religious and secular, had mobilised against the new family law, initiating a public debate via online journals such as www.meydaan.org, running a post-card campaign, and encouraging ordinary women from across the country to phone their representative and register their protest against the proposed legislation.

As a result, the proposed law was sent back to the legal commission for further review, postponing the vote in Parliament. The Ministry of Justice announced they have amended the law, removing articles 23 and 25, the most contentious among women's rights activists. The revised law was due to be sent to the Parliament for vote after Ramadan, nevertheless, WLUML is not satisfied with the amended legislation.

The bill, which is presented by the government as family law "reform", does not in fact provide more gender equality, according to activists. Even though a diverse coalition of women's rights activists and even some moderate clerics and politicians persuaded a judicial commission to drop some of the most contested articles and the Majles made Parliament pass an amended version on 9 September 2008, the amended family law and many other laws pertaining to personal status are still very male biased. (The Feminist School, September 2008)

WLUML calls upon the Iranian authorities to work directly with women's rights advocates to pass genuine family law reform, one that wholly prohibits discrimination against women in all its forms. We demand the Iranian legal and judicial systems to ensure Iranian women enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as men during marriage and at its dissolution, including matters related to inheritance, custody and guardianship of children, and blood price. We urge the Iranian officials to unequivocally ban polygamy under the law. WLUML is particularly focused on family law, as these laws define and redefine the position of women in society. (Women News Network, September 2008)

Sources: WLUML Networkers, The Feminist School, Women News Network

NIGERIA: Local women's groups protest against indecent clothing Bill

On 2 July 2008, a public hearing for a bill on 'indecent clothing' witnessed a massive protest from local women's groups at the National Assembly Complex in Nigeria. A report was provided by BOABAB, a National Human Rights Organization for women.

Senator Eme Ufot Ekaette used section 45 of the 1999 Constitution to validate the Bill, as it permits legislations that are in the 'interest' of public morality. She stated that indecent styles of clothing are the cause of rape, sexual intimidation, mental problems and divorce.

Senate President, David Mark, said that the laws are different from morality and thus must not be confused; the Act to Punish and Prohibit Public Nudity, Sexual Intimidation and Other Related Offences 2008 was based on the grounds of morality.

Human Rights groups, including Asma'u Joda and Sindi Medar-Gould, on behalf of Nigerian women, opposed the Bill with a united front, on 13 grounds. According to these groups, the Bill manifested gross unconstitutionality in its provisions and was clearly discriminatory against women, disregarding as it does the universally recognised principles of the presumption of innocence. It provides an expansive definition of public nudity beyond its ordinary meaning, overlooking the diverse cultural and belief systems in Nigeria. The Bill is contrary to constitutionally and internationally guaranteed rights which prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender. It also gives wide powers to police officers, who have access to limited resources to fight crime, providing them with the excuse to harass people and invade their personal lives.

The Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women (LACVAW), affirmed the consideration of the Bill by the National Assembly along with a further Bill for an Act to Punish and Prohibit Sexual Offences and Other Related Matters 2008. Senator Chris Anyanwu stated it would ensure protection of women and children in light of the rising trend of sexual crime. The harmonized bill, Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Bill, is a product of nine bills put before the National Assembly from 2000 to 2008.

The Senate Committee on Human Rights Judiciary and Legal Matters promised to take the process further by compiling all the memoranda, comments and observations into a report and submitting it to the National Assembly.

Source: **BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights**

BAOBAB

BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights is a not for profit, non-governmental women's human rights organization, which focuses on women's legal rights issues under the three (3) systems of law - customary, statutory and religious laws in Nigeria. The organization evolved from an ad hoc group of activists, social scientists, lawyers, and specialists in Muslim laws and Arabic who were responsible for executing the Women and Laws Nigeria project, under the auspices of the International Solidarity Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws from 1993 to 1996.

BAOBAB operates from a national office in Lagos and with outreach teams in 14 states across Nigeria.

For more information visit www.baobabwomen.org

MALAYSIA: Sisters in Islam condemn anti-women fatwas

SIS denounces the series of recent fatwas issued in Malaysia, including those against tomboys and practicing yoga. Malaysia's Islamic religious council issued a fatwa against Muslim women dressing 'like men' in an effort, it claimed, to prevent lesbianism. In a statement, the Director-general of the National Fatwa Council, Datuk Wan Mohamad Sheikh Abd Aziz said:

"Actually, we are trying to save these women (from becoming lesbians)." [Malaysia Today, Nov 2008]



Source: WLUML Networkers

Under Shari'a law in Malaysia, engaging in lesbian activities can incur a fine of up to RM 5,000 (£898), imprisonment for up to three years, a whipping of up to six lashes, or a combination thereof. Malaysia has made some good progress in the advancement of women's rights.

However, it still needs to be ensured that a woman's right to define her identity and lifestyle is not curbed and controlled by those with narrow perspectives on gender. In Malaysia, unlike some Muslim countries, a fatwa is enforceable by law once it is gazetted. Therefore, any fatwa or ruling that discriminates against any segment of society, especially minorities, will be detrimental towards gender justice in Malaysia.

"How do the authorities define a tomboy? A woman with short hair? Who wears pants? Wears shirts? Has no make-up? Many Malaysian women sport short hair, wear pants, shirts and don't wear make-up. And how do the authorities define manly behaviour? Not gentle and demure enough? Talking too loudly? Who would and how could one define and determine whether a woman is a tomboy or a lesbian?" [SIS Press Release, 2008]

SIS have, in a press release condemned, the series of recent fatwas issued in Malaysia; they urge the government, political and religious leaders, including the National Fatwa Council, to give more focus to the effort of upholding justice, equality, civil liberty and democracy in Malaysia, which are values intrinsic to Islam. Furthermore, SIS believes that the obsession with policing people's morality, finding fault in people, or spying on Muslims has nothing to do with Islam. Islam is totally against any character defamation. In fact, Islam regards privacy and preserving one's dignity as a fundamental right. Thus any human-made law cannot violate these rights enshrined in Islam.

The Malaysian government and all political parties have to enhance their efforts to create gender awareness among civil servants, and political and religious leaders, emphasising that women who dress or behave in ways that are perceived by certain quarters to be "unfeminine" are not a menace to society. In fact, many of these women hold respectable positions and actively contribute to society.

Sources: Press Release from Sisters in Islam, Malaysia Today

AWID FORUM: WLUML SESSIONS

Religious (Re)Interpretation for Social Justice: Emerging Feminist Voices in Islam

One strategy used by some women's rights advocates is religious re-interpretation: working for social, legal, political, and economic justice within the framework of Islam. In recent decades a new discourse has emerged arguing for equality within a Muslim framework nurtured by an emerging feminist scholarship that is not only unearthing a hidden history, but also separating patriarchy from Islamic ideals. The forms this takes include not only approaching *tafsir* (scriptural/Quranic exegesis) and *fiqh* (Muslim forms of jurisprudence) with a sensitivity to gender, but also new and creative forms of working within religion to advocate for women's human rights. Working within a religious framework is not necessarily regressive; indeed the attempts by Muslim fundamentalists to translate anachronistic and patriarchal interpretations of shari'a into policy have in fact provoked many women to increasingly criticize these interpretations and spurred them to greater activism.

This panel was moderated by Dr. Ayesha Imam, who explained how working for change within a religious framework was one of many strategies employed by WLUML networkers. The first speaker was Dr. Laleh Bakhtiar, a leading scholar on the psychology of "spiritual chivalry" (*futuwwa, javanmardi*) and has written over 20 books on Islam and translated 25 works. She is the first American woman to have translated the Quran and has since made a reading of her translation available in digital format. She explained in her talk how the existing English translations of verse 4:34 of the Quran read: "Husbands who fear adversity on the part of wives, admonish them, leave their bed, and beat them" although she found that the Arabic root word of 'to beat' has 25 different meanings; one of which merely means, "to go away."

Waheeda Amien is an academic in the Law Faculty of the University of Cape Town and is also a board member of various South African human rights and women's rights organisations. Specialising in Muslim Family Laws and women's rights, her research focuses on constitutional jurisdictions with Muslim minorities and considers how the conflict between religious freedom and women's right to equality can be overcome without undermining women's rights. Although the AWID Forum was held in Cape Town, many participants were not familiar with the South African legal systems, especially in relation to religious minority communities. Waheeda Amien's paper on women and Muslim personal status laws provided new insights into the legal and social dynamics of post-colonial South Africa.

Zarqa Nawaz became well-known in Canada for her short comedic films about Muslims in Canada and subsequently for her acclaimed television series, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. In her presentation, Ms. Nawaz not only discussed her use of comedy to address serious issues, but also the power of documentary films. Showing a clip from her documentary, *Me and the Mosque*, Ms. Nawaz explained how she travelled around North America to create the documentary and give visibility to a serious issue in an accessible manner. [*Me and the Mosque*, is reviewed in this issue on page 10]

Due to unavoidable circumstances, two scheduled speakers were unable to attend the Forum. We missed the presence and insights of Dr. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, a legal anthropologist and professor specialising in Islamic law, gender, and development. We were sorry that Dr. Isatou Touray, founding director of the Gambian Committee on Traditional and Harmful Practices (GAMCOTRAP), was also unable to attend.

Aisha Shaheed

Why Secularism is a Women's Issue

This panel brought together six women from diverse contexts to discuss the relationship between secularism and women's rights. Confronting different understandings of the concept of secularism - from separation between state and religion, to equal tolerance by the state of different religions - panellists discussed with the audience why secularism has become an important aspect of women's struggle in the political context of rising fundamentalism in Europe, North America, North Africa and at the UN level. Discussions included the erosion of secular space in schools and other public venues, through legislation, and by curbing the freedom of the press. At the international level, the 2005 United Nations Resolution on "Combating defamation of religions" threatens the very right to openly criticise and question religion, and actions taken in the name of religion.

The session was facilitated by Marieme Hélie-Lucas, an Algerian sociologist and psychotherapist, presently living in France. She is the founder and former international coordinator of WLUML and is also the founder and coordinator of SIAWI (Secularism is a Women's Issue). Bringing together the challenges and strategies articulated by the speakers from their diverse contexts, the session described how secularism is not antithetical to religion but is a human rights issue. The speakers specifically addressed themselves to potential allies who want to preserve equal rights but fear being labelled divisive or prejudiced to religious communities.

The speakers included Gita Sahgal, a founding member of Women Against Fundamentalism and Awaaz: South Asia Watch, an organisation of secular individuals working against the religious right in South Asia, based in the UK. She has also made documentaries on numerous subjects including the Rushdie affair and has written on women's movements, secularism, fundamentalism and the war on terror, most recently suggesting the idea of antinomian feminism in 'Legislating Utopia: Violence against Women, identities and interventions'.

Stasa Zajovic is a long-time activist in Serbia and is the co-founder and coordinator of Women in Black - Belgrade. She also founded the feminist group Zena i društvo ("Woman and Society"), a hotline for women and children victims of violence, and has been involved in the Belgrade Women's Lobby, the Women's Parliament, and the Civic Resistance Movement. A secular campaigner and a feminist, Ms. Zajovic received the UN Millennium Peace Prize sponsored by UNIFEM in the name of Women in Black in 2001 and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

From Algeria, two WLUML networkers described the retrogressive Algerian Family Code and how it affects and controls personal aspects of women's lives. Laalia Ducos, part of the *20 ans Barakat!* ("20 years is enough!") collective. Currently based in France, Ms. Ducos spoke of the attacks on secularism in both Europe and North Africa and how the struggle to abrogate the Family Code in Algeria is an issue for women in France. Malika Zouba is a women's human rights activist and a journalist who writes articles relating to women's status in the face of Muslim fundamentalism, and translates key documents.

Alia Hogben is currently the Executive Director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) and is very active in advocating for Canadian Muslim women. In 2005, the province of Ontario faced a large-scale debate over religious arbitration in matters of personal status law. CCMW was one of the few Muslim organizations who argued against the introduction of a separate and parallel legal system, arguing that this well-intentioned attempt at accommodating religious minorities would - based on various cultural and economic factors - actually result in a limitation of rights guaranteed to other Canadian women.

Aisha Shaheed



& WLUML CAMPAIGNS

The SKSW Campaign & the Campaign to Open Sport Stadiums to Women in Iran

During the AWID 2008 Forum in Cape Town South Africa, Women Living Under Muslim Laws showcased two distinct and important campaigns side by side, thereby demonstrating the diversity and collaboration that makes its network unique.

The Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women! and **the Campaign to Open Stadiums to Women's Audience** each occupied a stall at the Campaign Corner space from 14 to 17 November 2008. The Campaign Corner comprised of over one dozen stalls presenting campaigns and initiatives by women's rights activists around the world. The space provided an ideal opportunity for delegates at the Forum to browse the activities of women's human rights defenders while learning more about issues affecting women from Iceland to Indonesia.



Source: WLUML Networkers

The Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women! as well as the Open Stadiums to Women's Audience Campaign utilized the Forum to broaden their visibility and outreach to over 2,000 forum delegates from every country on earth.

WLUML launched the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women! in November 2007 to end the relentless misuse of religion and culture to justify killing women as punishment for violating the imposed 'norms' of sexual behaviour. The Open Stadiums to Women's Audience Campaign is an Iranian initiative launched in 2005 to reverse the ban on women in Iran's national sports stadiums. The campaign also works to raise awareness, especially among younger women, on gender segregation and women's limited access to the public sphere in Iran.

At the Forum, members of both campaigns, a lively and diverse team of women's rights advocates, worked to publicize their initiatives by handing out pamphlets and fliers, engaging in dialogue with Forum participants, showing films and powerpoint presentations, and collecting signatures for campaign petitions. Campaign volunteers – all WLUML networkers – were on hand throughout the Forum to answer questions and interject these issues into other discussions both in formal sessions and informal discussions.



The Open Stadiums to Women's Audience Campaign was able to collect hundreds of signatures for its petition to the International Football Federation in protest of Iran's gender discriminatory policies.

Likewise, the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women! received hundreds of names from those interested in partnering with the campaign through "Sister Campaigns", or local initiatives working to end culturally-justified violence. Through its Campaign Corner stalls, WLUML was able to leave a lasting impression on Forum participants.

WLUML presented two campaigns that were significantly different on many levels. One is global, the other local. One works on violence against women, the other on women's access to the public sphere. But in spite of their different focuses, the juxtaposition of two equally strong presences at the Forum reflected the remarkable range of WLUML's networkers and the contexts in which they work.

Rochelle Terman



Campaigns corner at the AWID Forum. L-R: Codou Bop, Elly Kilroy, Ayesha Imam, Mehreen Malik and Farida Shaheed. © WLUML

For more information about the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women (SKSW) visit: www.stop-killing.org (English)

NEWS FROM NETWORKERS

From Morocco to Cataluña: Feminisms, multiculturalism and identity rights

It was sheer coincidence that the two conferences I attended, in Morocco and in Cataluña, took place one after the other at the end of October 2008. However, some common debates around topics of concern to the network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) were surely not coincidental. The topics discussed raised questions which were, and continue to be, central to the current renewal of feminist claims throughout the world: How are feminist ideologies constructed in such diverse contexts? What are their relationships to culture and religion, whose influences are so marked, at least in contemporary Muslim societies?

The first meeting was held 21-25 October 2008 at the University Mohammed V in Rabat, which has an established tradition since 1996 of organizing, every three years, reflections around feminist research in the Franco-phone academic environment. This conference, the fifth in the series, brought together French speakers, mainly from the African continent, Europe and the Americas, around: **“Feminism in the face of the challenges of multiculturalism”**. One question cut across most discussions:

Can the universalism of feminism, as an instrument for achieving sex equality, confront the challenges of multiculturalism?

In Morocco, where the monarchic Islamic tradition has profoundly transformed the *Mudawana*, based on the Shari’a, is it possible to invoke secularism to reach the same goals? In the preamble to the conference, Malika Benradi, who organized the meeting, asked whether women could define themselves as feminists while remaining attached to their cultural identity. When she met “pure and strong” feminists, she noticed the deadlocks to which the debates of the decade on “difference” led. According to Benradi, the different oppositions set out by the feminist discourses in constant evolution, like those of “equality and difference”, “differences between women”, and nowadays, the “multiple intersecting differences: gender, race, class...”, were they relevant for identity claims no less democratic than socio-political demands for justice and equality. In short, can a woman be feminist and Muslim? Are feminism and multiculturalism opposed?

The 3rd Feminist Islamic Congress, organised in Barcelona by the *Junta Islámica*, 24-27 October, followed the Conference in Morocco, but asked different questions. Present were those well-known for their Islamic, academic and activist feminism, like Amina Wadud (US), Asma Barlas (Pakistan/US), Margot Badran (US), or Norani Othman (Malaysia); and those of researchers interested in Islam and women’s rights in the Muslim world or in Muslim communities in the West, like Penda Mbow or myself from Senegal, Fatima Khafagy (Egypt), Anouar Majid (Morocco), and representatives of religious organisations, civil society or political parties and institutions, like the Deputy Sabin Malik, Baronesses Uddin and Haleh Afshar (UK). This Congress confirmed from the beginning the **legitimacy of Islamic feminism**, and had as a priority **discussions on the relationship between the latter and global feminism**, and ideas as to how to improve strategies to promote women’s rights supported by national and international human rights organisations in the current context of globalisation.

Having been invited as a speaker to both conferences, I will not report their debates; rather, I will focus on a significant preoccupation both shared: How to position feminism between the religious and the political? My own contribution was around the complex relationships between politics, culture and religion (in this case Islam), and their impact on the political discourses and practices addressed to women.

The religious, considered as a dimension belonging to the private sphere in secular countries, makes its presence felt in the public and the political in the Muslim world as well as in the US or in European Union member states. The debates in both conferences were about the confrontation between the secularization of laws in favour of advances in terms of women’s rights – as proposed by Penda Mbow in Barcelona or by myself, in Rabat and Barcelona–, and a rigorous feminist interpretation of religious prescriptions to reach the same results.

Norani Othman, among others, believes that Islamic feminists continue the fight for equality through re-interpretation of religious texts.

Norani Othman
at the 3rd Feminist Islamic
Congress in Barcelona © WLUML



According to Malika Benradi in Rabat, as well as Norani Othman, Amina Wadud and Aicha Al-Hajjami in Barcelona, Islamic feminists have not stopped fighting religious beliefs contrary to the principle of equality; they have fought for the right to re-interpretation, or at least for an interpretation from a gender perspective (Wadud), in order to achieve necessary juridical and social changes.

The debate around the rejection of the religious versus its reappropriation by women produced a huge number of contradictory reflections that are a recurring preoccupation of the WLUML network. How can we – indeed is it possible to – reconcile the universality and specificity of human rights to attain at once, equality, citizenship, and dignity? Can feminist movements, already so diverse, negotiate their egalitarian perspectives with movements claiming respect for their culture, often patriarchal, and for their religious frame of reference, also patriarchal? There is a need, as it emerged from the two conferences, for a political reading of the multiple causes or issues of different forms of Islamic feminism in their perspective in the face of other movements.

These questions have, without cease, punctuated the history of feminisms, worldwide. However, the current state of affairs gives them a new dimension, in the face of a growing need to re-envision the rights of every woman, beyond cultural differences, at the centre of a politics of social equality.

Report by Fatou Sow

Senegal: Confronting impunity in cases of violence against women

Senegalese women's movements are today facing a grave situation where violence against women seems to be a mass phenomenon, prevalent in the city as well as in the countryside, and affecting all categories of women.

The mobilisation of the Senegalese women's movement has already achieved results in terms of the public's awareness that violence against women (VAW) is unacceptable, and in January 1999 a law was passed which criminalises domestic violence, paedophilia, sexual harassment, rape, incest and female genital mutilation. However, since there has been an overall increase in the number of (often fatal) cases as well as the number of those taken to court, the leniency of the judges who often disqualify these crimes as lesser offences, or release the offenders without condemning them, is nothing short of astonishing. One of the main consequences of this impunity is that the perpetrators of violence against women believe that they can continue to offend without facing prosecution.

Two other phenomena exacerbate the consequences of this impunity:

1. the social practice of negotiation between the victims, or the parents of victims, and the perpetrators of the violence that lead to the former withdrawing their complaint;
2. the weak political will of the state in honouring its national, regional and international commitments to protect women's rights and to ensure their physical security.

The **Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Sénégal (GREFELS)** feels that it has become urgent and necessary to explore other strategies to strengthen the protection of women against violence, and to put an end to impunity. Among these strategies, an advocacy campaign that aims to obtain, from the Ministry of Justice, the right for women's associations to bring civil actions before the Court should a woman who has been victim of violence or the parents of a girl who has been raped decide, under pressure or bribery, to withdraw their claim. Today, such a strategy seems even more critical given that the Senegalese Penal Code is in the process of being revised.

During a forum on the findings of a study on VAW in Senegal, the advocacy campaign for civil action was launched and a committee for its implementation was created including GREFELS and other women's groups and individuals (in this case, men). Its role is: (1) to negotiate, with the commission responsible for penal code reform, the inclusion of an article on the capacity to bring civil actions before the Court; (2) to draft the article; (3) to contact and learn from trade unions about their experiences in civil actions for the defence of their members' collective interests; (4) to identify which specific and priority cases that need civil action are to be undertaken.

Report by Codou Bop

The 2008 WIDE Annual Conference: "Feminist Visions for a Just Europe"

The 2008 Women in Development Europe (WIDE) Annual Conference entitled, "Feminist Visions for a Just Europe", was held in The Hague, in the Netherlands, 9–11 October. The 2008 conference was hosted by WOMEN, the Dutch Gender Platform.

Up to 200 women and around ten men participated in the conference. While the overall theme was contemporary feminisms in Europe it was the financial crisis that dominated. Participants were deeply concerned about the severity of the crisis, given that it will be women who are the principal victims. There was widespread denunciation of neo-liberalism and globalization, and a proposal was put forward for a crisis plan: a focus group would analyse the responsibilities of corporations, exploring the role of a variety of European actors, and looking at the feminization of the market, climate change, and the environment.

On Day One of the conference, the theme of which was '**Rethinking feminisms in Europe today in the context of global change**', I attended a workshop on the concept of citizenship, which took into account both the legal and participatory notions of citizenship. We discussed questions such as, what kind of citizenship is available to those who migrate to Europe, and I had the occasion to talk about the discriminatory nature of French laws that allow the family codes of countries of origin to govern the lives of naturalised French citizens and those with dual-nationality.

On Day Two, the theme of which was '**European global players and their role in the world examined through the lens of women's rights and gender justice**' and many Eastern European feminists voiced their resentment towards the Europe community; one critique was that it abused its influence in the struggle for gender equality by funding women's rights organizations while simultaneously promoting a narrowly neo-liberal vision that favoured privatisation of state-run services. This led people to believe that the European community was more interested in capitalist markets than in women's rights.

These sessions also focused on the world market and the exploitation of women's labour within it. In Asia there are factories that exclusively employ women and force them to work up to 15 hours a day with only one day off per month. In Europe, the flow of migration has led to a feminization of work in the field of social services; there is an increasing demand for these services owing to ageing populations. Women are seen as a work force that will work harder, for less money and under worse conditions.

Furthermore, the politics of immigration in Europe, and the methods employed, were strongly criticised. European borders have become increasingly militarised; according to reports, 6,000 people have died as a consequence of mistreatment at borders, immigration centres, and raids against migrants. These instances significantly undermine the fight for human rights in Europe. Once an immigrant is allowed into an EU country their migrant status makes them politically invisible, and they suffer institutionalised exclusion. In some cases, women migrants have been living for 20-25 years in an EU country, without any adjustment in their status.

The conference ended by asking feminists to make public their challenge for a more equitable Europe, and to insist on the importance of responding to global events and actively networking.

Report by Laalia Ducos

For more information about WIDE visit:
www.wide-network.org

REVIEWS

FILM: *My Daughter the Terrorist*

Dir: Beate Arnestad and Morten Daae (Sri Lanka, 2007) 60 mins

The documentary film, *My Daughter the Terrorist*, follows two young Sri Lankan women who are training for a future suicide attack; we also meet their mothers who live in a nearby village. This is the first documentary to get close to members of the feared Sri Lankan guerrilla army, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The film has provoked much controversy, its narrative accused of being 'terrorist-friendly', and the debate on whether it should be dismissed as pure Tamil Tiger propaganda continues on online forums to this day.



The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) – known as the Tamil Tigers – were formed in 1972 in protest against the Sinhalese Government. Their aim is to secure a separate state in the north and east of the country. About 70,000 people have been killed and tens of thousands have been displaced in suicide bombings and military clashes.

In the light of recent media reports that hundreds of people have been killed, and scores wounded in Sri Lanka's northern Vanni region, following intensified fighting between the Sri Lanka Security Forces and the Liberation Tigers, this documentary film has a particular relevance and poignancy. With at least 250,000 civilians in the area of fighting, trapped between the two armies and the jungle, the two warring parties are exchanging accusations over the deaths.

Dharsika and Puhachuda are both 24 years old. At the age of 12 they joined the 'Black Tigers', a unit responsible for conducting suicide attacks that was created by the rebels in 1987. Since then the two young women have been trained as soldiers and participated in battles; they are ready to blow themselves and many others up. Dharsika and Puhachuda say they are doing this for their people as part of their struggle for a free country. In the course of the documentary, it is slowly revealed what has happened to these girls and their families; a picture emerges of why someone would attach a bomb to their belt, walk into a public area, and kill themselves, and others, in such a brutal way.

My Daughter the Terrorist evokes the terrible emotional cost of war: a war is always a tragedy for everyone involved. However, many important questions are left unanswered, such as the price paid by the victims of these suicide attacks, and by their families. Furthermore, the documentary fails to adequately present the political and historical context of this conflict. *My Daughter the Terrorist* is, nonetheless, worth watching, telling as it does the story of a group of people whose voices are seldom heard, either in the media or in popular culture.

Johanna Heden

FILM: *Me and the Mosque*

Dir: Zarqa Nawaz (Canada, 2005) 52 min.

Me and the Mosque is a compelling documentary, addressing issues of serious concern for practicing Muslims in North America.

Zarqa Nawaz explores resistance to gender segregation in mosques. Over the last 15 years, the erection of barriers separating women and men has become increasingly common in Canadian mosques. By travelling all over Canada and the US and talking to women, Zarqa Nawaz finds she is not alone in feeling excluded from the community, or in experiencing a spiritual loneliness. Even though the documentary deals with the serious issue of cultural discrimination against women, and is full of nostalgia for Nawaz's childhood when mosques were integrated, lively meeting places, Nawaz still manages to bring some humour to this personal quest. This should come as no surprise to those familiar with her popular TV series, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.

Due to her lightness of tone and ability to gently probe her subjects, Zarqa Nawaz achieves the often difficult task of exposing dysfunctions and discontent within some Muslim communities and criticising the way issues are brushed under the carpet, whilst as a devout Muslim herself of Pakistani origin, not blaming the religion of Islam or seeking to demonise the men who practice it, as all equally oppressive and ignorant. There are also some enlightening interviews with scholars of the Qur'an and *hadith* that challenge the notion of strict gender apartheid as practiced in many Muslim communities. Therefore, this is a movie I believe everyone can learn something from.

The movie can be ordered from the National Film Board of Canada at www.nfb.ca

Johanna Heden

BOOK: *Fe-mail. The trials and tribulations of being a Good Egyptian Girl.* Amy Mowafi (2008)



'When she was good, she was very very good, and when she was bad she...'. This is the introductory sentence of a unique book exploring the persistent desire of many Arab women to be 'a Good girl'.

Amy Mowafi shatters the shiny, opaque surface of a patriarchal Egyptian society, which has long sought, for its own glory, to reflect exclusively female gendered virtues such as virginity and modesty, and succeeds in revealing the desires and frustrations of a single woman living in modern-day Cairo.

Mowafi's amusing narration of her adventures exposes the challenges she faces in striking a balance between being her true self and the person her parents would like her to be, setting the scene for a wider debate around virtue and image, and family and societal pressures. Survival, she assures the reader, is certainly not a question of honesty:

"Integrity? Sincerity? Candour? For wimps. This is a battle. You are a virgin until proven otherwise. [...] And the best bit is your average Arab man is more than willing to feign ignorance as to the ways of the world. He has no desire to know the truth. [...] Of course this begs the question: If every Arab boy spends his youth proudly sowing his seed, and every Arab girl is fabulously virtuous, where exactly are these seeds being harvested?"

The narrator's individual struggle is represented by the cover picture of a 'She Girl', at once a kind of angel, "all softness, quietness, tenderness and stay-at-homeliness", that most Egyptian men are looking to marry, and an 'It Girl', a modern, devilish and ambitious woman.

The power and the emotional drive of Mowafi's narrative style capture the reader's attention, and her use of conversational English makes this an accessible and engaging read.

Chiara Maurilio

BOOK: Canadian Muslims Women at the Crossroads.

Various authors (2007)

In 2006, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) held their annual conference under the theme of 'Canadian Muslim Women at the Crossroads: From Integration to Segregation?'. The conference raised the issue of Muslim women in Canada within a context of increasing anti-Muslim and anti-immigration sentiments on the one hand, and on the other, the potentially isolating practices advocated by well-intentioned policy-makers in the name of 'accommodating' and 'catering to' religious minority communities. This conference and the research papers it produced was propelled by a fierce debate in 2005 with the misguided attempt to implement religious arbitration in family law matters for Muslim communities in the province of Ontario. CCMW had been at the forefront of the debate, as one of the few Muslim groups to argue against parallel legal systems and that formalizing private religious arbitration would not necessarily be in the best interests of Muslim women. Along with national and international allies – including the Women Living Under Muslim Laws solidarity network – the CCMW argued that due to crucial factors of gender, culture and tradition, many women may not have free and equal access to justice through religious channels. Indeed, the separate legal system of religious arbitration has the potential to override the civic and legal rights guaranteed under the Canadian constitution, and both provincial and federal laws.

The three research papers commissioned by CCMW in 2006 are linked by their concern with the decrease in Canadian Muslim women's civic engagement over the past few decades. They pose the question:

Are Muslim women in Canada actually a separate group with distinct needs and requirements?

As a collection, these studies argue that this culturally relativist approach not only renders Muslim women and their communities somehow above criticism but even beyond the reach of solidarity.

In "Cultural Relativism: Theoretical, Political and Ideological Debates" Dr. Shahrzad Mojab and Nadeen El-Kassem unpack the ideology of cultural relativism, defined as discourses which highlight the "particularity, uniqueness and localism of cultures, ethnicities, nations, and religions". Cultural relativistic arguments position Muslim women as having specific needs and requirements distinct from other Canadian women.

Cultural relativism, they argue, therefore has the result of homogenizing Canadian Muslim women and reducing their identity to their faith. The authors eloquently argue that this framework results in marginalising and segregating Muslim women, by even the most well-intentioned policy-makers, academics and journalists, who wish to 'accommodate' a group with perceived special and distinct needs.

Gökçe Yurkadul conducted in-depth interviews with 14 Muslim women from diverse ethnic, social and economic backgrounds on six aspects of their lives which may impact upon their decision-making processes (dating; marriage and inter-marriage; education; work and finances; divorce; and seeking legal advice in Canada).

In 'Islam and Decision-Making: The Effects of Religion and Family in Muslim Women's Lives', she uses the methodology of social anthropology to investigate the issue of choice and empowerment. With the debate over religious arbitration in Ontario, the CCMW felt the need to provide further evidence that many factors of Muslim women's lives affected their ability to make *informed* decisions, including about where and how to access legal systems. While Muslim women may make choices, the research finds that these choices are strongly affected by family and community influences, many of which are indivisible from religious beliefs and cultural practices. She concludes that certain factors enable Muslim women in Canada to make informed choices, including financial independence, community participation, civic and political participation, and the presence of grassroots organizations.

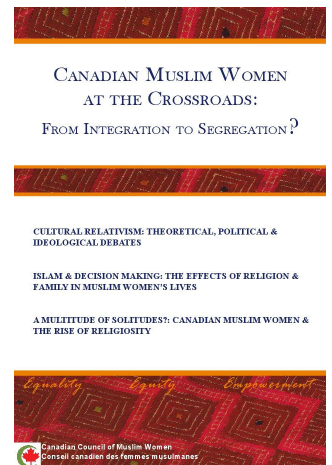
Ideologies which promote a narrow and exclusionary version of Islam, in which women are discouraged from participating in mainstream, secular society, do not encourage mainstream participation and in the past few years debates have arisen in Canada around issues of gender-segregation in public institutions and veiling. In 'A Multitude of Solitudes?: Canadian Muslim Women and Rising Religiosity', Eman M. Ahmed explores the strands of 'puritan' and 'moderate' Islam espoused by the Muslim women interviews. The title refers to the Canadian epithet of "two solitudes", namely the long-standing divisions between Anglophone and Francophone society, and suggests that greater fragmentation of migrant groups in Canada is engendering multiple "solitudes" and distance. This study traces the evolution of Muslim women's relative integration in a multicultural Canadian society in the 1960s, to being a group largely 'disinterested and disengaged' from mainstream civil society. Through interviews with Muslim women, this paper explores the respondents' beliefs about Islam and womanhood against the backdrop of global politics since 11 September 2001, including the spread of Wahabi Islam and an increasing 'Us' versus 'Them' mentality amongst diasporic communities, promoted in mainstream media and voiced by Muslim groups themselves. Many of the women interviewed expressed the desire for greater exclusion and segregation in the realms of schools, public spaces and holidays. Tellingly, when asked what being Canadian meant to them, a number of the interviewees did not cite mainstays of Canadian civic discourses (such as multiculturalism, international peace-keeping, environmentalism, democracy, etc.), but rather the 'right to practice my religion'.

CCMW maintains that, especially in a context of xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments, Canadian Muslim women cannot afford to be exclusionary and must be active, informed and participatory citizens.

Aisha Shaheed

The Introduction of the book is available to download here:

www.ccmw.com/documents/CanadianMuslimWomenatCrossroads_Introduction.pdf



UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Women reclaiming and re-defining cultures: Asserting rights over body, self and public spaces

In October 2008, WLUML embarked upon a three-year collective project with the Institute of Women's Empowerment (IWE). This transnational and interdisciplinary project addresses issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, in response to UN Millennium Development Goal number 3 (MDG3). This programme will develop strategies for women's empowerment that can effectively counter disempowering forces, which are attempting to legitimise themselves by reference to 'culture', including 'religion'. Thematic focuses include sexuality, violence against women, and property rights.

Launch of Musawah

In February 2009, Sisters in Islam will host the **launch of Musawah** - a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family - in Malaysia. This global movement will work towards equality and justice in Muslim families. It argues that "change is necessary because many Muslim family laws and practices are unjust and do not respond to the lives and experiences of Muslim families and individuals" and that "change is possible through a framework of equality and justice that is consistent with Islamic teachings, universal human rights principles, fundamental rights and constitutional guarantees, and the lived realities of women and men today."

For more information, please see

www.musawah.org

Launch of the Campaign to Reform Rape Laws in Sudan

The campaign will be officially launched on 31 January 2009 at the close of the Khartoum Conference, which will be attended by members of Sudanese organisations from different regions of the country, and African activists from Senegal, Mauritania, and Nigeria. The campaign, initiated by the Salmah Women's Resource Center, in close collaboration with the Mutawinat Group, and the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights and Environmental Development, receives the support of WLUML and aims to change the unjust rape laws still in use in Sudan. It is worthwhile remembering that in 1999, Sudanese members of the WLUML network published a report entitled *Women and Law in Sudan* in two volumes, as part of the programme: 'Women and Law in the Muslim world'.

The Religious-Secular Divide: The US Case

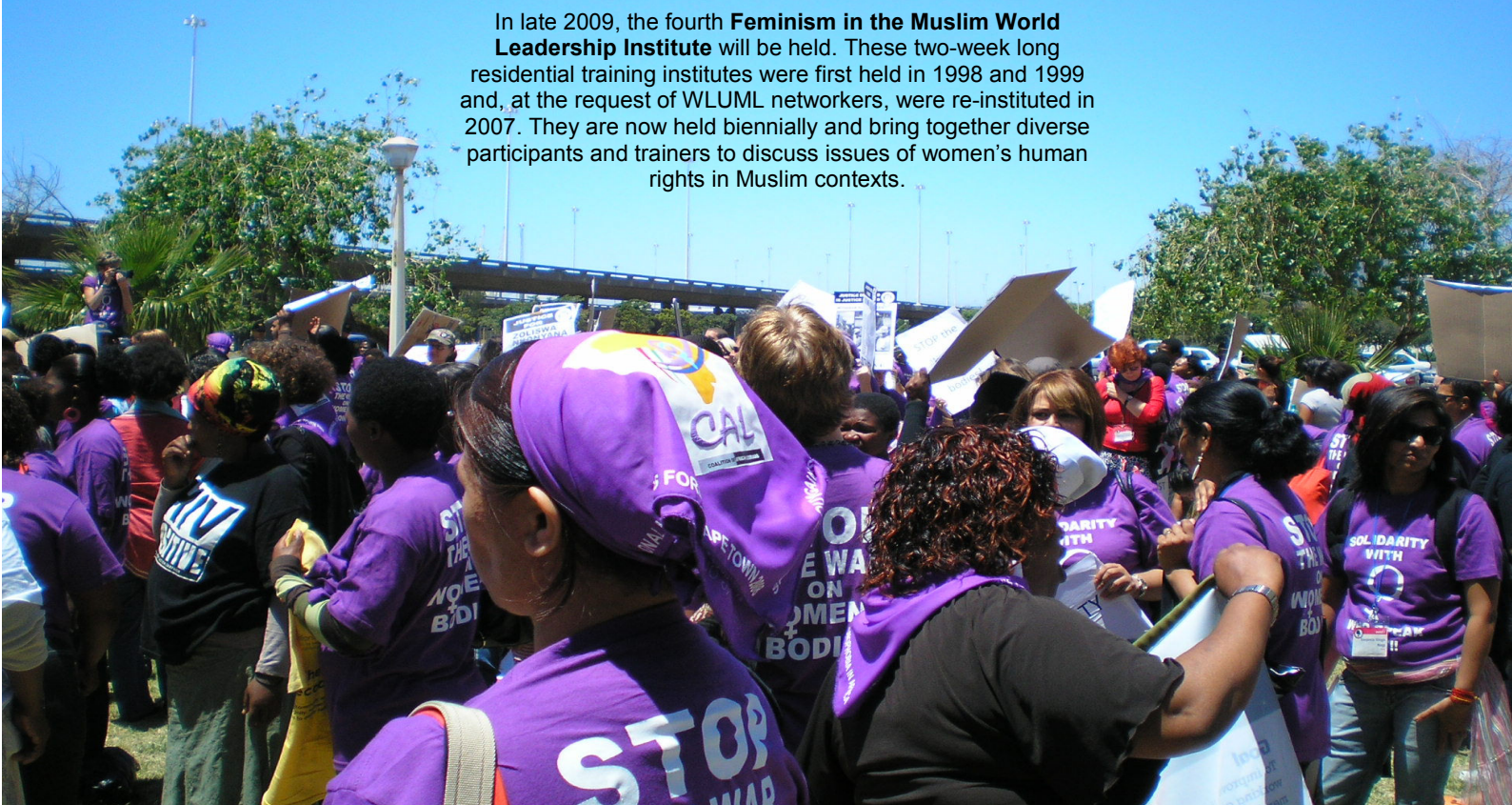
"**The Religious-Secular Divide: The US Case**" conference will be held on 5-6 March 2009 in New York. The conference will explore the tension between religion and secularity in the United States, which is long-standing, widespread, and increasingly intense. This is evident in contemporary debates over such issues as evolution and intelligent design which challenge the traditional absence of religious discourse from education, in the increasing importance of religious priorities in political decision-making, in governmental reliance on spiritual or faith-based philanthropy, and on the role of faith-based communities in lobbying for legislation or bringing out the vote to elect candidates.

For more information, please see

www.socres.org/religiousseculardivide

Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institute

In late 2009, the fourth **Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institute** will be held. These two-week long residential training institutes were first held in 1998 and 1999 and, at the request of WLUML networkers, were re-instituted in 2007. They are now held biennially and bring together diverse participants and trainers to discuss issues of women's human rights in Muslim contexts.



We would be happy to receive your comments, suggestions or feedback. Please, write to pubs@wluml.org