

BLASPHEMY LAW AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN

Asia Bibi, a Christian woman and mother of five, was sentenced to death in November 2010 for blasphemy in Pakistan, the first conviction of its kind for a woman. Ms Bibi was accused by a group of female Muslim labourers who complained that she had made derogatory comments about the Prophet Mohammed.

The Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, supported Ms Bibi and asked for a presidential pardon for her. He was murdered on 3 January 2011 by his own bodyguard for what is thought to be his public support for Ms Bibi. His murderer was hailed as a hero, not only by religious fundamentalist elements of society but many others including lawyers who garlanded him when he appeared in court.

Sherry Rehman, a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) parliamentarian, who submitted a bill in December 2010 seeking to repeal or at least review blasphemy laws, with proposed amendments including consideration of the intent of the accused, must now fear for her life.

Blasphemy laws in their current draconian form are very different from their original form in the Indian Penal Code, under which damaging or defiling a place of worship or a sacred object was deemed a criminal act. Pakistan's Criminal Code extended the ambit of the law by adding sections that dealt with enraging religious feelings in the people and defiling the Qur'an.

However, it was under the Islamisation of Pakistani society and the military dictator, Zia ul Haq, that a section was inserted in the Criminal Code to criminalise defamation of the Prophet Mohammad, and make it punishable by life imprisonment. Zia added the death penalty as an option for this conviction. Nawaz Sharif, Zia's prodigy, made death mandatory in 1990 for punishment under this section.

Since 1986, blasphemy law has somehow become a rallying point for Islamists and Muslim vigilantes, who oppose any amendment to the law with threats of

anarchy. When Sherry Rahman proposed her bill on blasphemy laws, thousands rallied across the country, calling for 'jihad' and pledging to sacrifice their lives to protect the honour of the holy Prophet Mohammad.

Mullahs and religious leaders have used skewed interpretations of Islam to establish their personal power and control over society since the creation of Pakistan. They have therefore leveraged all opportunities to garner support for religion-based laws in Pakistan. Religion has also been used by leaders across the political spectrum to further their political power.

Leaders like Zia, Nawaz Sharif and even Bhutto and Zardari have promulgated or supported retrogressive laws like the Hudood Ordinances, legislation declaring the Ahmadis to be non-Muslims, and Nizam-e-Adl legislation (April 2009) that formally established *shari'a* law in the Malakand division and would have led to 'Talibanisation' of the region. Support from leaders who were not particularly inclined to the conservative ideology forming the basis of these laws demonstrates the political utility of religion and the extent of the hold of militant religious groups in Pakistan.

Individuals and groups have also used laws like the blasphemy law for personal gains and private vendettas. According to the Independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), the allegations of blasphemy tend to be "premeditated", levied against others for reasons of personal enmity, economic rivalry or political motivation.

However, the citizens of Pakistan have historically not supported militant or conservative Islamic groups in public polls and have condemned unfair legislation like the *hudood* laws that punish the victims of rape. Thousands of lawyers came forward to defend a misinformed notion of blasphemy and its punishment. It is ironic that 500 lawyers signed up to defend Taseer's killer while none of them protested the killing of 32 victims accused

of blasphemy since 1986. Many of these victims had been acquitted by courts and others were killed in horrifying incidents of vigilante justice, even within jails.

Women's rights have generally been perceived as a Western issue and contrary to Pakistani culture and tradition. It has therefore been an uphill battle to ensure that women's rights to equality and non-discrimination are understood as part of all fundamental human rights. The extreme and almost universal support of misinformed notions of blasphemy shows the level of religious intolerance prevalent in society. This coming together of people from across society including so-called moderate Pakistanis raises serious doubts about the future of human rights and especially women's rights in Pakistan.

Fauzia Vigar



Solidarity for women's rights in Pakistan during the 16 Days of Activism – see p4 for more.

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EDITORIAL

CHANGING PERSONNEL AT THE WLUML ICO

Greetings from Aneela Majid (centre) who joins the team, and farewells as Fatou Sow (left) and Aisha Lee Shaheed (right) reflect on their time at the International Coordination Office



Firstly, a big thank you to Fatou and Aisha for the time they spent with me at the ICO and their patience with a WLUML novice. The ICO team has been terrific in helping me to understand the work of the organisation. Coming to my role of Fundraising and Resource Coordinator from outside the network, I know I have a steep learning curve.

A bit of background: I was born, raised and educated in the UK. I am of Pakistani descent and have a fine arts education. After 10 years of studio practice, I decided against being a starving artist. This led to 11 years of working in the UK charity sector, in organisations concerned with Asian women, homelessness and disability; I am currently Chair of a Hindu/Muslim charitable organisation.

Some upcoming issues for the year: The decision for WLUML to apply to become a UK charitable organisation and fit within the more regulated framework of the UK charitable model will definitely move WLUML towards institutionalisation. Although it may be a difficult transition, I do believe the benefits of these changes will speak for themselves in time.

The start to this year also brings with it a real and urgent need to fundraise for WLUML operations. We have a fundraising committee due to meet shortly; if you would like to join it or have suggestions, your experience and support is very welcome (please email me at: aneela@wluml.org).

So, in summary, we may be looking forward to a period where the line, "Hang on to your hats, we may be in for a bumpy ride" applies... but not for long.

Aneela Majid

Overseeing the co-ordination of WLUML has been among my most rewarding activities in recent years. The challenges were massive for an organisation of this nature, but exciting. It took hard work and good spirit to maintain relationships across continents. We have to preserve and strengthen the analytical skills and solidarity of the members of the network, and expand our collective actions.

Our discussions on the interweaving of cultures, religions and politics have allowed us, despite the diversity and complexity of our historical, cultural, economic and political contexts, and despite some controversies, to develop strategies tailored around the same feminist ambition: the human rights of women and those of communities.

Our solidarity was manifested in all forms: appeals against violations of fundamental rights; support of our allies threatened in their freedom of conscience and speech; petitions against unjust laws in the name of religion or coercive measures on women's bodies in the name of indecency; campaigns against all forms of violence; support for legal reforms, and many others. This moral and political solidarity is essential in resistance to all fundamentalisms that overwhelm us.

I thank my wonderful team at the ICO: Aisha Lee Shaheed, Giulia Girardi, Chiara Maurilio, Anthonia Onwordi, Eleanor Kilroy, Johanna Heden, Roya Rahmani, Lidia Noronha, Shaina Greiff, Nandita Dutta and Sara Yasin; and all volunteers who have given their time so generously. To Aneela Majid, who has taken over the reins, I say thank you and wish her good luck.

Fatou Sow

I have held WLUML in high regard since I was a teenager when I read the material published by the network, which resonated with me very deeply. It was tremendously inspiring to learn there was a collective of women's rights defenders that transcends national, cultural, religious and professional boundaries in shared struggles for justice. After working for a year at the Regional Coordination Office for Asia, I learned more about the different ways in which WLUML works: through publications, networking, campaigning and more.

It was a privilege to join the International Coordination Office in 2007 and during my time here, as Communications Officer and as Deputy Coordinator, I have learned a great deal and made long-lasting connections. From watching young women new to WLUML develop into active networkers to learning from the founding generation of the network, I have sought to be one of the bridges between generations and between cultural contexts. The simultaneous use of different political strategies and various methods of working is a unique model and despite its challenges, I believe that the multiplicity of views and beliefs in the WLUML network is one of its key strengths.

Though the time has come for me to move on from the ICO, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to my colleagues and friends over the years, and especially to Fatou Sow, Homa Hoodfar and Marieme Hélie-Lucas for their support and inspiration. I look forward to remaining an active WLUML networker and continuing our shared journey towards unconditional rights for all women.

Aisha Lee Shaheed



SOLIDARITY

EGYPT / A CALL TO FEMINIST SISTERS WORLDWIDE

February 2011: “On 25 January 2011, a revolution began... Something that impressed me in this revolution, that made my dreams come true: I saw a feminist movement united, powerful and engaging in the political situation, a historical precedent. We are united for one cause, regardless of ideology, generation or political affiliation. Women showed a great example... in the front lines: co-ordinating, strategising and implementing. As my dear friend, Mozn Hassan, said, we fought in the public and private realm to claim our rights, and this is the core of our feminist struggle. A day will come when we will tell the glorious stories of the Egyptian people. We will prove that no matter how long injustice prevails, one day it will always come to an end.

“Finally, I am writing this piece before the Friday of Departure, which will be a crucial day in the history of our nation. I call upon feminist sisters all over the world to show their solidarity, support their fellow Egyptian women, and scandalise this brutal regime. In solidarity we believe and for liberty we live. Long live the Egyptian people!”

Fatma Emam

www.wluml.org/node/6926

IRAN / SHIVA NAZAR AHARI'S FOUR-YEAR SENTENCE IS FINAL, SAYS LAWYER

January 2011: Shiva Nazar Ahari was twice arrested after the 2009 Iranian presidential election. She was first arrested by security forces on 14 June 2009. She was released on 13 October 2009 on bail of \$200,000, but arrested again on 19 December 2009. Branch 36 of Tehran Appeals Courts acquitted Ms Nazar Ahari from charges of “assembly and collusion against the regime”, reducing her sentence to four years in prison, and also changed her exile location from the township of Izeh to one of the prisons in Karaj. Ms Nazar Ahari, 26, a human rights activist and university student, was temporarily released from prison on bail of \$500,000 on 12 September 2010. In her lower court on 4 September 2010, she had been sentenced to six years in prison, exile to Izeh and 74 lashes.

www.wluml.org/node/6881

TUNISIA / WOMEN'S DEMANDS FOR EQUALITY

January 2011: Excerpt from a manifesto:

“We, Tunisian women, express both pride in this revolution that belongs to all Tunisians and a determination that we will not be dispossessed... The Tunisian woman is a modern woman who actively participates in the political, social and cultural development of the country. It is, therefore, imperative that these reforms are committed to the separation of religion and politics, and guarantee equality and the rights of all Tunisians, male and female, to an emancipated and dignified political and social life.

“The current political scene is unstable, and negotiations are underway for the recognition of all the political parties that will make their demands. We, therefore, express our reservation in relation to the integration into the political landscape of religious movements or totalitarian and sectarian ideologies in the absence of a constitutional reform that guarantees the separation of politics and religion.”

Read full text (in French) at:
<http://tinyurl.com/6hh326l>

GAMBIA / TRIAL CONTINUES OF WHRD'S ISATOU TOURAY AND AMIE BOJANG-SISSOHO

January 2011: Isatou Touray and Amie Bojang-Sissoho are, respectively, the Executive Director and Program Coordinator for the Gambia Committee for Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP), and have for many years been active in the promotion of gender equality, and rights of women and children, particularly in the fight against female genital mutilation and other discriminatory practices.

In May 2010, the Presidency set up a commission of investigation into the allegation that GAMCOTRAP had been mismanaging donor funds from an organisation called Yolocamba Solidaridad. The Coalition for Human Rights in the Gambia states that “After careful investigation, the various reports and documents, the Committee had concluded that allegations of abuse were unfounded. But, after presenting her findings, the commission was dissolved and some of its members dismissed by the Gambian government. A second committee was then established, but while the GAMCOTRAP [was] awaiting the conclusions of this second investigation, the two women were arrested and imprisoned.”

Dr Touray and Ms Bojang-Sissoho were released on bail on 20 October 2010, and their trial continues. Call for the fair trial of Dr Isatou Touray and Ms Amie Bojang-Sissoho.

www.wluml.org/node/6883

CAMPAIGNS

GLOBAL / 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

The Violence is Not Our Culture (VNC) Campaign marked its third year with global action during the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence (25 November to 10 December 2010). The 16 Days of Activism offered the Campaign key opportunities for raising the profile of its concerns on 'culture'- and gender-based discrimination and violence against women (VAW).

As part of the global action, the Campaign dedicated the International Day for Women Human Rights Defenders, 29 November, to individuals and organisations including its own activists, partners and networks. The joint action focused on how 'culture' is being used to violate women's fundamental rights and freedoms (particularly on expression, information, association and public participation) and how those who assert their rights are being targeted in the name of culture, custom, tradition and religion.

At a local level, VNC campaigning took various forms and addressed a diverse range of concerns on VAW and 'culture'.

In **Pakistan**, the Baidarie organisation's activities included dialogue with local community leaders and government officials, and the launch of its online petition demanding that the government reintroduce the bill on domestic violence in Parliament. Shirkat Gah, together with its local partners the South Asia Partnership (SAP) Pakistan, the Women Workers Help Line, and Kashf Foundation organised a walk in solidarity with women's rights activists outside the Lahore Press Club. A large number of activists from women's rights NGOs participated in the walk calling for an end to violence against women and 'honour' killing.

In **Germany**, Iranian women's rights activists under the banner of 'Equal Despite Difference' held a meeting amongst Iranian lesbians to strategise their collective actions to fight homophobia and violence against lesbians in Iranian society

both within and outside Iran including in cyberspace. Participants came from a range of countries including Germany, Sweden, Austria, the UK and (via Skype) Turkey. A public event also took place on 30 November to present the situation of LGBT rights activists in Iran.

In **Indonesia**, Solidaritas Perempuan and local partners in South Sulawesi organised meetings with grassroots women, dialogues with government officials, radio talks, and screening of the documentary *Makkunrai Makkutana* (about the case of whipping a minor accused of sexual misconduct). South Sulawesi province is one of the five provinces in the country actively imposing discriminatory policies against women and girls, especially control over their bodies in the name of *shari'a*. Findings of their study and their demands to review all laws made in the name of religion that undermine Indonesia's commitment to gender equality were discussed at a roundtable meeting attended by civil society and local government officials.

In the province of **Aceh**, close to 100 people – activists, academics, local government officials and religious

scholars – attended the meeting organised by Solidaritas Perempuan-Aceh on 29 November. Experts' papers were presented, all pointing to the misinterpretation and misuse of *shari'a* across the province. The meeting successfully laid the foundation for consensus-building amongst stakeholders regarding the importance of pressing the provincial government of Aceh to address the growing abuse of *shari'a* by local religious leaders with support from the local government authorities.

In **Sudan**, where the internet is one of the most secure spaces that can be used freely to discuss issues considered sensitive or taboo, the Salmamah Women's Resource Centre held workshops on how to use social media in tackling VAW, with a focus on sexual harassment. A workshop for journalists and caricaturists focused on how sensitive issues can be tackled through tools such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook. The caricaturists drew caricatures on sexual harassment that were then published in newspapers during the 16 Days of Activism; they will also be published for public dissemination. A workshop for young activists focused on sensitising them on the issue of sexual harassment and what role they could play in preventing it by using alternative media.

Edna Aquino



Activists outside Lahore Press Club, calling for an end to violence against women.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND ACTIVISM

INTERVIEW / SOMALI MEDIA WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

The Somali Media Women's Association (SOMWA) is a grassroots NGO in Somalia dedicated to increasing the presence of women in the media. They also organise capacity building and empowerment projects. The founder, Marian Zeila, leads the organisation from London, where she is based.

Sara: What is SOMWA's relationship with other international organisations?

Marian: SOMWA has partnered with a few international organisations, such as IREX (International Research and Exchange Board). SOMWA has also partnered with CARE International in creating a Media Women Empowerment Project.

S: How has political unrest impacted SOMWA's ability to partner with international organisations?

M: For some organisations, it has been difficult to partner with SOMWA or any other organisation, because Al-Shabaab has banned them from working in the country. When Al-Shabaab was banning CARE activities in Somalia, SOMWA was about to end its activities and project with CARE. However, SOMWA is not stopping their work, and they continue to keep in touch with NGOs, but there are still some groups that are unable to partner with local NGOs in Somalia because of Al-Shabaab.

S: What involvement does SOMWA want with the international community?

M: SOMWA needs support and funding from other international organisations. SOMWA is also interested in partnering with other organisations as well.

S: What are the types of projects that SOMWA wants to collaborate on internationally?

M: Development, media empowerment, and particularly making the role of women larger in the media.

S: How has political unrest impacted SOMWA's work?

M: The political unrest has greatly impacted us, and we can't work in some regions because the groups don't allow women to work. Despite this, we still organise training workshops. We have had media advocacy trainings and workshops, where 100 female journalists and members of civil society participated. We still implement workshops in Mogadishu, despite restrictions. In the future, we are planning to have more workshops on women's empowerment and advocacy.

S: What is the nature of your partnerships (locally and abroad)?

M: We have a good relationship with both local and abroad organisations and we look towards the international community for support. We work with other organisations in the region as well.

S: What are some of the projects you would like to create in the future?

M: SOMWA wants to continue with capacity building programmes, and expand the types of workshops that it conducts. We want to create different programmes, involving advocacy and lobbying, and we need far more resources to do that. Ideally, SOMWA would like to create a network for Somali women in the media, and other organisations dedicated to women.

S: What are some of the challenges for SOMWA, particularly in trying to promote more advocacy?

M: At the moment, it is not safe to be an activist, and this causes difficulties for local NGOs. This is because NGOs face more challenges with political groups in the country. They may be harassed, jailed or even killed for their jobs.

Sara Yasin

The full interview is available at: www.wluml.org/node/6929

LAW PRIZE / SHADI SADR

The Katharine & George Alexander Law Prize brings recognition to lawyers who have used their legal careers to help alleviate injustice and inequity. The 2010 award winner was Shadi Sadr, Iranian human rights and women's rights lawyer, and WLUML Council member. This is an excerpt from her acceptance speech:

"There is little documented information available about sexual torture and harassment in prison during the first decade after the Islamists gained power in Iran. To this day, no one knows the exact number of prisoners executed between 1981 and 1988 merely for their political beliefs... I promised to speak today, not of statistics and numbers, not in the general sense, but of the specifics, of people and faces..."

"The first name and face is that of Niloufar Tashayod, a 15-year-old high school student. She was arrested at her school for having participated in an anti-governmental demonstration and having distributed flyers of the leftist organization she was a supporter of. She was sentenced to execution. The organization she supported condemned armed conflict and stood for political struggle. She was tried, without an attorney, in a court hearing that lasted less than five minutes and within three months of her arrest, without even a chance to see her family, she was executed.

"Years later, one of her cell mates wrote about her and said, 'I lay down next to Niloufar. She held my hand and said, 'I am afraid of dying.' I looked at her, not knowing what to say. My heart was trembling... I held her head in my arms and said, 'Niloufar Jan, who says we are going to die?' She held me tight like an abandoned child and said, 'They won't let me out of here.' Then slowly she started to cry.'" She was executed by a firing squad in September of 1981."

The full speech is available at: www.wluml.org/node/6771

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND ACTIVISM

INTERVIEW / MAHBOUBEH ABBASGHOLIZADEH

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh was awarded the 2010 Johann Philipp Palm Prize for defending freedom of expression and freedom of the press in September for her 'extraordinary' efforts in defence of these freedoms, which have involved facing great personal risk. The prize, awarded every other year to people or institutions, carries a cash award of €20,000.

Carolyn: What are your hopes or expectations for your activities now?

Mahboubeh: I'm an Iranian woman activist, so changing the situation of Iran is my priority. Right now all of the different movements in Iran are engaged in the democratic movement, the Green Movement. But we are afraid, as a feminist movement, that this democratic movement might not be gender-sensitive, because we had the same experience before in the 1979 Revolution: people were revolutionary, but they were not gender-sensitive, and they didn't care about women's rights. We are afraid that people will again repeat this cycle and experience.

My concern is how we can generalise the democratic movement right now. I think that we have to change our strategy – the feminist movement strategy – after the Green Movement from gender issues to a 'fusion' strategy. It means a mixture between some important things in the democratic movement and gender issues together. The issue right now, for me, is how we can find out what is this 'fusion' strategy in feminist issues and democratic or political issues.

C: Is that what you've been working on recently?

M: After the election last year I didn't have any other way – I had two choices, between prison and exile. I preferred to leave my country. But the first nights, when I was in Turkey, in various small hotels, I thought in that time, how can I continue my struggle outside of Iran? What can I do right now that I couldn't do inside of

Iran? I promised to myself that I would establish TV for women – radio, TV, or both – special broadcasts for Iranian women. Inside of Iran, it is impossible that you would establish a private channel, because everything is under the control of the government.

I am making a new network between activists, a broadcast by activist people. It's like citizen TV, it's not professional TV or for professional broadcasts. It's being established right now, it's under process. But the TV name is Zanan TV, and the radio is 'Radio Margin' because it mostly talks about marginalised people. The most important strategy in this TV is the creating of a new discourse. We think that – this is



A member of the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign, the Iranian Women's Charter movement, and the One Million Signatures Campaign, Ms Abbasgholizadeh has been arrested multiple times since 2004 by Iranian authorities for her actions in defense of women's and human rights. For participating in peaceful protests and coordinating awareness campaigns in Iran and internationally, she has been the target of arbitrary detention and prosecution. In May 2010, she was charged in absentia with "acts against national security through conspiracy and collusion intended to disrupt public security, disturbing public order and defiance against government officers," and sentenced to two and a half years in prison and 30 lashes.

my idea – that the discourse of women's groups in Iran right now mostly focuses on women's law, or family law issues, but we need to change this discourse for a more fusion discourse, like discourse about secularism and women's issues, or Islamisation and women's issues.

C: What has been your experience with international solidarity and interacting with women's groups around the world?

M: The women's movement right now is not national, it's not in borders, it's global. I think that it is totally interactive. For example, the stoning and adultery issue – I was one of the members of the Stop Stoning Forever campaign in Iran. When we started to work on this issue, we reviewed the experience of the Sudan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, even Kurdistan, and how they worked on adultery issues, and after our experience, the Iran case was an example for other countries. We also had the One Million Signatures campaign in Iran and this experience started from the experience of Moroccan women. You see how different kinds of campaigns are related together. And I think that our struggle in Iran against fundamentalism can truly influence women's situations in Malaysia or Indonesia, or in other Muslim countries.

C: In the face of all of your struggles, what motivates you to continue your activism?

M: It's a very difficult question. Sometimes I say to myself, "Mahboubeh, you are in exile, you are in Amsterdam, for example – you can start a new life here, and forget what happened inside of Iran, and you can continue your life like ordinary people." It is very difficult to say what motivates me to continue my struggle outside, after this kind of pressure. I can just say that seeking empowerment, or reaching to freedom – these are very human issues. We don't have these rights inside of Iran. Then, for me also – being active, or activism, it is the main part of my identity. If I say, "OK, I won't be active", I lose my identity.

Carolyn Barnett



HIGHLIGHTS / MUSLIM WOMEN IN SPORTS – 2010

2010 was a successful year for sportswomen from the Muslim world, despite ongoing resistance and restrictions.

Asian Games (Guangzhou, November)

Women's participation brought about success for countries that had previously not sent female athletes to the Games. Iran won 59 medals and was ranked fourth in the games, thanks to their 88 female athletes who won 13 of these medals. The Pakistani women's cricket team won gold – the first gold medal for Pakistan in eight years. Pakistan attended the Asian games with 25 women, Afghanistan with 7, and Saudi Arabia with none (out of 170 athletes).

Women's Football Cup Arabia (Bahrain, October)

As a build-up to the Women's Football World Cup 2011, to be held in Germany, the German Foreign Office and the General Organization for Youth & Sports in the Kingdom of Bahrain hosted 'Women's Football Cup ARABIA 2010 – On the road to Germany'. The winning Jordanian team – followed by Egypt and Bahrain – is now benefiting from exclusive training in Germany in the run-up to the 2011 games.

Winter Olympics (Vancouver, July)

Five women from Muslim countries attended the 2010 Winter Olympics: Tugba Karademir, Tugba Dasedemir and Kerime Cetinkaya from Turkey, Chirine Njeim from Lebanon, and Marjan Kalhor from Iran. Kalhor was the first female skier from her country to attend the Winter Olympics.

Youth Olympics (Singapore, August)

A highlight of the Youth Olympics was the friendly football match between two women's teams from Turkey and Iran. The game ended 4–2 against Iran, but the overall winners were Muslim sportswomen, who have long been striving to enter the sporting arena in the face of multiple limitations. In the end, Iran attended the games with 22 sportswomen, Egypt with 30, Turkey with 29, Tunisia with 12, Algeria with



CHANNEL 4

Ambreen Sadiq, 16, the first Muslim female boxer in the UK

6, Morocco with 3, Oman, Jordan and Libya with 2 each, Somalia, UAE, Iraq, Pakistan and Syria with 1 each.

European Muslims

Ambreen Sadiq, 16, lives in Bradford, UK and has won the national female championship in boxing. She is not only known as the first Muslim female boxer in the UK, but is also considered a superstar of the future in her field. Sadiq was shortlisted for Junior Personality of the Year at the British Asian Sports Awards 2010.

Another European success came from the Muslim Women's Sports Foundation (MWSF), which was awarded a £235,000 grant by the Football Foundation, the UK's largest sports charity.

Unlike their neighbours, Italy and the Netherlands decided to change clothing regulations in public swimming pools and allowed burkinis (swimsuits that only reveal face, hands and feet), arguing that it will enable easier integration into society for veiled Muslim women.

Pakistan

Squash champion Maria Toor Pakay was another highlight of 2010, due to

her bravery against Taliban militants who opposed her participation in the sport. Pakay is the winner of the Women's COAS International 2010 and known as the squash star of her country.

Turkey

In July, Turkish hurdler Nevin Yanit was voted European Female Athlete of the Month due to her national record of 12.63 seconds for 100m hurdles in Barcelona. Also, in November, the Turkish national volleyball team finished sixth at the Women's World Volleyball Championship.

Iran

Iranian sportswomen brought pride to their country in 2010 in the Asian Games, Youth Olympics and in Winter Olympics. In Tehran, the conference 'Woman and girls, let's move: International Conference' was held in November, during which professionals and academics from Denmark (Prof Gertrud Pfister), Australia (Janice Crosswhite), Venezuela (Prof Rosa Lopez de D'Amico) and Iran (Prof Maryam Koushkie Jahromi) discussed topics including sport participation, inactivity, new trends in sports, and opportunities in large cities.

The FIFA headscarf ban for the Olympics has finally been lifted, thanks to the 'Accept and Respect' declaration and other initiatives of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW) and opposition from the public. However, veiled sportswomen continue to struggle against discriminatory dress regulations: Sura Al-Shawk, a 19-year-old Swiss basketball player of Iraqi origin, is now a public figure for this reason.

Another unfortunate occurrence was the National Olympics Committee of Iran cutting the budget of the Islamic Federation of Women's Sport (IFWS), eventually resulting in closure of the organisation. IFWS has been organising the Women's Islamic Games since 1993.

Sertaç Sehlikoğlu

<http://muslimwomeninsports.blogspot.com>

NEWS FROM NETWORKERS

PERU / CLADEM INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR 'EDUCATION: BEYOND THE GOALS'

As a WLUML networker I had the privilege of participating in the International Seminar hosted by the Latin American and Caribbean Network for the Defence of the Rights of Women (CLADEM) in Lima, Peru. The three-day seminar, entitled 'Education: Beyond the Goals', was held 14–16 October 2010.

The seminar brought together about 60 activists, representatives of women's organisations and human rights groups from more than 20 countries in Latin American, with delegates from Africa and Asia. A focus of the conference was the Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 – achieving universal primary education and reducing gender inequality by 2015. Throughout the conference we thus discussed both progress towards the goals and how to overcome their shortfalls. Experiences and strategies were shared from a diversity of local contexts on how to create and promote non-discriminatory and non-sexist education, both inside and outside institutional school settings.

UN Special Rapporteur on Education, Vernor Muñoz Villalobos, also took the opportunity to present his groundbreaking report on the human right to

comprehensive sex education. The report outlines the importance and necessity of providing sex education to youth, and its potential to reduce unwanted pregnancies, the transmission of STIs, the burdens of social welfare and healthcare costs, and to build healthier societies.

CLADEM's campaign is incredibly inspiring and a welcomed call to action for the transnational feminist movement. Momentum is being gained through various international and domestic actions. These include implementing teacher training programmes, revising curriculums to ensure they foster critical thinking and non-sexist values, undertaking media analysis of popular education campaigns, and using comic strips and new media to reach out to youth. Next steps are engaging in closer collaboration with states and educational institutions to increase accessibility, increasing incentives for children, particularly girls, to attend schools, and documenting cases which violate the right to education for transnational advocacy.

<http://educacion-nosexista.org>

Rima Athar

SENEGAL / AFRICAN FORUM FOR FEMINISTS

The Third African Feminist Forum, held in Dakar, 20–25 October 2010, was attended by approximately 100 feminists from around Africa. The Forum focused on 'Feminist Connections: Reconnecting with Ourselves and Our Communities'. Disconnections exist within the movement, at various levels of vision, reflection and action; between activists themselves; and between activists and their communities. Yet African feminists "need to struggle together, to think together and celebrate together". Several clusters around the self, community, money and markets, environment, power and states set the framework of the debates.

The connections between power, state and women's movements are crucial. Women have to be sensitised to the warning signs of political, cultural and religious fundamentalisms targeting them and their communities. They need to organise responses, because the state does not protect them. Some states ignore women's struggles; others capture women's demands for their own purposes.

Forty years after the International Year of the Woman and a UN Decade for Women, we still feel the gap between their discourses and practices. Last October, at the Nairobi launch of the African Women's Decade, Ms Migiro, the Ugandan UN Deputy-Secretary General, declared: "African leaders must take their commitments seriously. Investing in women and girls is one of the greatest investments we can make." This leads to an important issue discussed at the Forum: How do African feminists approach and challenge money and markets, to fund the feminist revolution?

Personally, I was concerned about connections among feminists in Africa. How do we sustain strong connections beyond our differences, many of which are linked to our subjectivities? "Are women their own worst enemies?" we asked ourselves. Against all odds, I trust we are not.

Fatou Sow



SAUDI ARABIA / TECHNOLOGY AND GENDER

In her seminal article, 'Saudi women: modernity and change', Hatoon Ajwad al-Fassi argues that technology has gradually institutionalised segregation. The following is an excerpt, published in *Industrialization in the Gulf*, Routledge 2011.

"When CCTV was introduced in Saudi Arabia, it was given a different function from its original uses, which included distance learning, surveillance, and entertainment. King Saud University first used CCTV in the late 1970s under the direction of Rector Abdulaziz al Fadda (1973–1979).

"The system became a medium through which women would learn under men by observing male teachers on television without being observed by them. Communication occurs between the sexes through an internal telephone. The teacher sits in a small studio furnished with a television camera aimed at his face, a white board, a light projector, and the telephone. Other supervision rooms take care of monitoring the studios and fixing any technical problems... The teacher is dependent on a female supervisor to tell him when the women are present and ready for him to start. The supervisor also keeps order in the class and proctors exams.

"In its first iterations, the system was not very efficient. When it failed to work, the teacher would come to the class and give his lecture face to face with the female students. This was especially true in the science departments. It was also hard to maintain CCTV between male and female campuses because of constant financial challenges due to the expense of doubly installing the technology. But the system improved little by little via the newest technology available on the market, and it eventually guaranteed a maximum degree of segregation and efficiency. And despite financial setbacks, Saudi Arabia's economic affluence has helped this happen in a permanent, institutionalized way."

<http://tinyurl.com/4hyryrt>

MALAYSIA / CONFERENCE 'REPOLITICIZING SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & RIGHTS'

'Repoliticizing Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights – A Transformative Framework: Beyond ICPD', an international conference in Langkawi, 3–6 August 2010, was co-organised by the Asian Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW) of Malaysia, and Reproductive Health Matters (RHM) of the UK. Some former and current WLUML networkers were among the 50 participants from health and human rights institutions around the world, as well as civil society and international organisations.

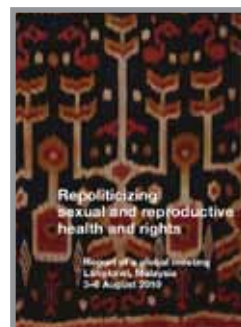
Participants were clearly engaged in "developing a forward-looking vision, that draws but moves beyond both the ICPD Programme of Action and the health MDGs, to a *transformative* approach, taking into account 21st century realities". They agreed that to repoliticise sexual and reproductive health and rights analysis and action was a necessary step, because of the current backlash against rights gained during population, women's and human rights conferences in the 1990s. Conservative and fundamentalist groups, at the level of the state and community, are openly contesting human rights, specifically related to sexuality and gender identity. Transnational movements complain about defamation of religion to question UN conventions.

Participants looked at critical issues for new strategies. The current macro-economic system deepens inequalities and prevents the state from achieving health for all. The health sector needs strong reforms in order to fulfil the universal right to the highest standards of health, accessibility, availability, acceptability and quality of services. Universal access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health, is a fundamental human right for all, including marginalised groups. This objective cannot be achieved without, claimed the participants, "a coalition of sexual and reproductive health practitioners, but also with a wide range of other people – HIV/AIDS activists, people living with HIV and

AIDS, public health and primary health care educators and practitioners, feminist groups, human rights defenders, youth coalitions and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex advocates".

In conclusion, they reaffirmed their strong commitment "to open dialogue among allies from diverse movements concerned with promoting health-related rights in general and sexual and reproductive rights in particular, in order to build a strong, collaborative basis for action".

Fatou Sow



WLUML

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

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WLUML is an international solidarity 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.

REVIEWS

BOOK

MUSLIM PORTRAITS: EVERYDAY LIVES IN INDIA

Mukulika Banerjee (ed.) (Indiana University Press, 2010)

Muslim Portraits provides true pictures of the lives of Muslims from different walks of life in India. India is bewilderingly diverse, and the presence of Muslims populations has always contributed to syncretism in local traditions and practices. The stories of the Muslims in this book show that though they practise Islam, they have their own regional, ethnic and social identities which often take precedence over their Islamic identity.

Communal harmony can be felt in the stories about the Muslim barber and his Hindu friend Jannu Lal, in Uttar Pradesh. Outside the places of worships, there exists a great degree of communality that binds the people together, though there are still tensions. The learned guide from Gujarat, Mohammad Hussain, who follows Ahl-e-Hadith ideology, criticises shrine culture and rituals. Meo Muslim storyteller Abdul exemplifies a folk artist who has come into contact with different people but whose caste and ethnic identity are still intact. Also interesting is this book's attention to the life of a sexual minority among the Muslim community in India: in Lucknow, a clandestinely formed gay group shared their emotions and lives.

Numerous stories provide examples of Muslim women achievers whose portraits not only inspire but create a ripple in the mind to push for greater status in life. This includes portraits on the life of Khatij from Kashmir; Aayisha, a madarasa teacher, and how her father struggled to give his daughter the best education; Dr Zakira Begum, a learned woman belonging to a royal family, and how the women in her family started a women's club to share their lives even while living in 'Gosha' or



BOOK

NEGOTIATING GENDER JUSTICE, CONTESTING DISCRIMINATION

Partners for Law in Development (2010)

Negotiating Gender Justice, Contesting Discrimination: Mapping Strategies that Intersect Culture, Women and Human Rights, published by Partners for Law in Development (PLD) in India, is based upon fieldwork conducted in Bangladesh, Indonesia, India and Nepal. The guide explores the strategies adopted by communities in order to challenge gender inequality. What is powerful about the book is that it focuses on strategies based on where they occur, thus accounting for economic, social and political factors specific to the region.

This simple and comprehensive guide paints a clear picture of very complicated matters. Through providing a look at some of the historical and political issues, and the realities and challenges of the organisations that face them, this book is a great start at identifying where the gaps are. The chapters start with the larger picture within a particular region, eventually working towards showing how organisations and individuals negotiate the inequalities within that region. Finally, the book moves into an analysis and comparison of the organisations, identifying some common threads.

What is most successful about *Negotiating Gender Justice* is that it blends theory with practical approaches to fighting for equality. While respecting the individuality and nuances of these different regions, the guide also recognises some of the common themes and methods utilised. In-depth case studies and comparative analysis make this is an important book.

Sara Yasin



'Purdah'; and the President of Panchayat in South India, Banu Beevi also known as Thalaivar Amma.

The stories demonstrate both inter- and intra-community challenges. One can read how the Tablighi group in Kashmir talks of pure Islam, external challenges and political unrest. Observations on the Barelvi and Deobandi rift and the conflict between Shamsiya and Jamat-e-Islam in Lakshwadeep depict sectarianism and ideological friction among the Muslim community in India. Figures like Javed Bhai, a local goon, Zamir, an enthusiast youth, and Alim from Lakshwadeep encounter the challenges and confrontation within and outside the Muslim community.

The 12 narratives collected here adopt a balanced approach in which cultural, social, economic, political and intra-religious diversity in Indian Islam is well portrayed. *Muslim Portraits* is an honest, in-depth and unbiased anthropological endeavour.

Qutub Kidwai



ANNOUNCEMENTS

NEW WLUML & VNC PUBLICATION ON ZINA LAWS

Control and Sexuality: The Revival of Zina Laws in Muslim Contexts is the latest publication from WLUML, in association with the Violence is Not Our Culture (VNC) Campaign. Written by Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Vanja Hamzić, with a foreword by Farida Shaheed, the UN Independent Expert on Cultural Rights, this publication scopes the (re)emergence of zina laws, which govern and are the basis for prosecution for sex outside of marriage, in Muslim contexts.

In the words of the authors:

This study is an attempt to unearth and analyse the historical and present-day cultural, legal and – above all – political motives and circumstances that really have caused the revival of zina laws. These catalysts... do not coincide with the official rhetoric on zina as ‘God-given’ moral stipulations which state or society simply strives to adhere to. Instead, they reveal how zina laws, which were obsolete and had rarely ever been applied in Muslim contexts, are now employed by state and non-state actors alike to assert and maintain control over the general populace’s sexuality and sociality, for the sake of a variety of political and social ends. (7)

Through a feminist analysis, this publication not only speaks to zina laws in general, but also engages in a comparative analysis of specific contexts. In a chapter entitled ‘Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence Against Women in Muslim Contexts’, there is outlined a

...feminist and rights-based critique of zina laws that engages Islamic legal tradition from within. It aims to broaden the scope of the debate over appropriate concepts and strategies for the campaigns to decriminalise consensual sex. It is intended as a contribution to the emerging feminist scholarship on Islam, but showing how zina laws can also be challenged from within. Exploring the intersections

between religion, culture and law that legitimate violence in the regulation of sexuality, this chapter aims to contribute to the development of a framework that can bring Islamic and human rights principles together. (21)

In its comparative framework, this publication looks at the specific country cases of Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey. These states were chosen in order to show the diversity of contexts in which zina laws (re)emerged, as well as a variety of legal and social manifestations. Through a detailed historical and legal analysis of each context, the authors denote many differences and derivations. However, the similarities they find are such:

All studied revivals of zina laws... were introduced at times of significant political changes, as part of a new elite’s opportunistic theopolitics, seizing a particular momentum for greater influence and control. Oftentimes, however, such laws were successful because the societal and legal outlook of the state in question was chronically patriarchal anyway, thus being a fertile ground for such reprehensible ruptures. As a result, mainly, of the women’s movements’ arduous resistance, zina laws, while still present ‘on paper’, are by and large obsolete in Pakistan and Nigeria. The advocacy of Acehnese civil society representatives succeeded in blocking the passage...

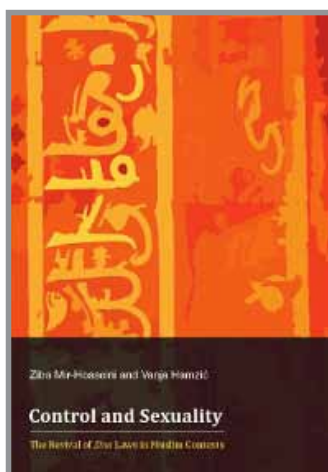
of the notorious Qanun Jinayat (Muslim Criminal Code), which would have provided for the offence of zina to be punishable by stoning to death or flogging in that province. In Iran, women’s activism has so far not succeeded in bringing about legal change, but it has taken the judiciary to task and exposed the injustices that zina laws entail, thus inserting human rights concerns into the very heart of the public debate. (9)

Control and Sexuality concludes with summary remarks and recommendations for the future. As a stated aim of Control and Sexuality, and the Violence is Not Our Culture Campaign, is to aid activists, movements, policy-makers, researchers, and other civil society actors in their struggle against violence against women justified in the name of ‘culture’, it closes, necessarily, with ‘Reflections on Ways Forward’.

Confronting oppressive laws and practices promoted as inseparable and fundamental to religion necessitates an ability to devise and implement multi-level, strategic approaches addressing a variety of their causes. In other words, because the catalysts of the revival of zina laws and similar phenomena are complex and many, the resistance strategies must be able to confront them all in some way, within a broader social justice framework. They have to be ‘owned’ and, indeed, driven primarily by the groups representing the voices of victims of such laws and practices. Violence embedded in regulation of human sexuality, particularly that which disproportionately affects women, is of such a nature and urgency that it calls for sustained civil society action, overcoming the existent ideological and class divisions. It requires individuals, groups and movements to remain in constant search for common grounds, instead of those that divide them. (222)

A sample chapter of *Control and Sexuality: The Revival of Zina Laws in Muslim Contexts* can be downloaded, and copies purchased, at:

www.wluml.org/node/6869



EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

WLUML ON FACEBOOK

WLUML has now created a Facebook page for the international solidarity network, where we will be sharing news articles, and political and cultural analysis relevant to women living under Muslim laws, in our four key languages: English, French, Arabic and Farsi. One you have 'liked' the page, you can share with friends and post comments.

www.facebook.com/pages/Women-Living-Under-Muslim-Laws-Solidarity-Network/173314106036158



'THE VEIL' EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The Veil: Visible & Invisible Spaces art exhibition has been travelling throughout the US since 2008, and includes the digital version of the WLUML Dress Codes and Modes exhibition. It presents the work of 30 artists from the US, Europe, India and the Middle East. They address current clichés and stereotypes about the veil – particularly Islamic practices – with paintings, sculpture, photographs, videos, film and installations, and reflect on the ubiquity and importance of the veil throughout human history and imagination.

The catalogue is now available and can be previewed at:

<http://tinyurl.com/46mlh82>

VIOLENCE IS NOT OUR CULTURE: NEW CAMPAIGN NAME AND WEBSITE

On the eve of this year's commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism to Eliminate Violence against Women, the Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women launched its new name – Violence is Not Our Culture: A Global Campaign to Stop Violence Against Women in the name of 'Culture' (or VNC Campaign). The change is in response to feedback from the campaign's activists and allies to broaden the scope of the campaign beyond specific manifestations of culturally justified VAW such as 'killing' and 'stoning'. The change of name is also timely as we launch our engagement in the debate at the UN on universality versus cultural relativism in human rights.

<http://stop-killing.org>

The VNC Campaign team also launched its online campaigning site to support local activists' use of ICTs in their campaigning. The site is intended to facilitate and support our partners' continuing learning and application of online tools for their campaigning to end violence against women and girls in the name of 'culture'. It is also a space intended to facilitate more collaboration in campaigning between the Global VNC Campaign team and our partners and networkers. The e-campaigning toolkit inspired by two workshops in the Africa and Asia regions last year was unveiled as the centrepiece of the online campaigning site.

www.vnc-campaigns.org

DISCLAIMER: The analysis and views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of any offices of the Women Living Under Muslim Laws – International Solidarity Network (WLUML) and the responsibility for all opinions, views and accuracy of information contained in this publication rests entirely with individual contributors.

NEW REPORT FROM AWID

Towards a Future without Fundamentalisms, by WLUML networker Cassandra Balchin and published by AWID, presents feminist strategies of resisting and challenging religious fundamentalisms, based on research that draws examples from across regions and different religious traditions. The report examines the factors that help religious fundamentalisms grow and the strategies fundamentalists use to promote their vision and strengthen their social and political power. It unmasks those strategies through feminist analysis and provides proposals and examples of how women's rights activists and their allies in other movements can work effectively towards a future without fundamentalisms.

The publication is available for download at: www.wluml.org/node/6839



PALESTINIAN QUEER ACTIVISTS TOUR THE US

In February, Palestinian queer activists from alQaws and Aswat will be touring the US in a series of public conversations. If you are in Minneapolis, Chicago, Cambridge, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco or Oakland, they hope you will join them for a fascinating and exciting conversation.

www.alqaws.org/q/

