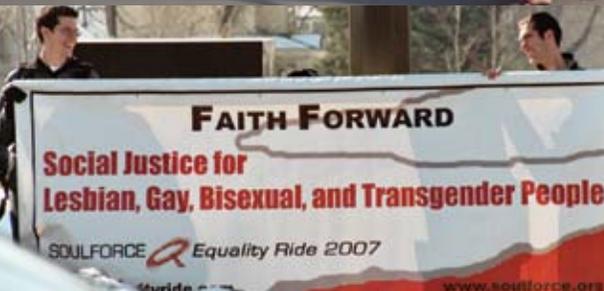


Key Learnings from Feminists on the Frontline:

Summaries of Case Studies
on Resisting and Challenging
Fundamentalisms



**Key Learnings from Feminists on the Frontline:
Summaries of Case Studies on Resisting and
Challenging Fundamentalisms**

Publications from AWID's Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms Initiative

The full-length versions of the Feminists on the Frontline case studies are available to view or download on the AWID website, www.awid.org. The brief summaries of the case studies—compiled by AWID and drawn from the full-length case studies—are included in this document.

Virginija Aleksejune, Margarita Jankauskaite and Vilana Pilinkaite-Sotirovic, Center for Equality Advancement
Confronting Catholic Fundamentalisms in the Former Soviet Union: The Case of Lithuania

Carmen Hein de Campos, Themis - Assessoria Jurídica e Estudos de Gênero
Mass Prosecution for Abortion: Violation of the Reproductive Rights of Women in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil

Guadalupe Elizalde Molina and Martha Guadalupe Figueroa Mier, edited by Luz Maceira Ochoa, COLEM - Colectivo de Mujeres de San Cristóbal de las Casas
Religious Fundamentalisms in Indigenous Contexts in Chiapas and the Violation of Women's Rights

Leona English, Lucille Harper and Betsy MacDonald, Antigonish Women's Resource Centre
Rural Feminist Activism and Religious Fundamentalism in Nova Scotia, Canada

Haven Herrin, Soulforce Q
Sexuality, Gender and the Religious Right: Youth Advocacy on LGBT Rights in the United States

Jessica Horn
Christian Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights in the African Context: Mapping the Terrain

Teresa Lanza Monje, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-Bolivia
Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms in Bolivia: The Inclusion of Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the Constitution

Nadine M., Meem
Arab Queer Women and Transgenders Confronting Diverse Religious Fundamentalisms: The Case of Meem in Lebanon

Jaris Mujica and Mauricio Rivera, PROMSEX Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos
An Overview of Fundamentalist Groups in Peru

Elizabeth Placido, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-México
Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms in Mexico: The Separation of Church and State and Reaffirmation of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Lucila Puyol and Paula Condrac, with Mirtha Manzur, Multisectorial de Mujeres de Santa Fe
The Death of Ana Maria Acevedo: Rallying Cry for the Women's Movement

Kauara Rodrigues, Juliano Alessander, Natalia Mori and Soraya Fleischer, CFEMEA - Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria
Religious and Political Fundamentalisms as a Threat to Women's Rights: Challenges in the Legislature in Brazil

Ydalid Rojas Salinas, Foro Regional de Arequipa por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos
Religious Fundamentalisms and the Therapeutic Abortion Protocol in Arequipa, Peru

Shadi Sadr, Stop Stoning Forever Campaign
Stones Aimed at Us: An Overview of the Discourse and Strategies of the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign

Trupti Shah, Sahiyar (Stree Sanghthan)
Religious Fundamentalisms and Communalism: The Case of Sahiyar

Carmen Sorrentino, Associazione Luca Coscioni
Associazione Luca Coscioni and the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research: An Italian Experience of Resisting Religious Fundamentalisms

Nathanael G. Sumaktoyo and Yuyun Rindiastuti
Religious Fundamentalisms and Student Life: A View from Indonesia

Stasa Zajovic and Katie Mahuron, Women in Black-Serbia
Challenging the Growing Power of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Public Life: The Case of Women in Black-Serbia

Key Learnings from Feminists on the Frontline: Summaries of Case Studies on Resisting and Challenging Fundamentalisms

Series: Feminists on the Frontline

Shareen Gokal, Rosanna Barbero, Cassandra Balchin

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The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is an international membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. AWID's mission is to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women.

Preface

This collection of 18 case studies produced by AWID's Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms Initiative aims to contribute to greater strategic thinking, dialogue and advocacy on religious fundamentalisms by women's rights organizations and movements.

In their efforts to confront religious fundamentalisms, women's rights activists signal a need for more information about women's strategies of resistance and challenge in other countries. AWID's 2007 survey of women's rights activists found that... found that 84% of activists see this as a major need. (see "Our research base" box to the right).

This collection of case studies aims to deepen the analysis of strategies contained in the initiative's other publications by providing contextual illustrations of strategies in practice and making more visible the inspiring scope of women's creativity and determination. The case studies also provide detailed insights into how religious fundamentalisms operate in different contexts. We hope the collection will contribute to the broader literature on strategies for social change and enrich our collective efforts in responding to the issue of religious fundamentalisms.

In 2008 AWID launched an open call for proposals in English, Spanish, French and Arabic for case studies documenting feminist strategizing to counter religious fundamentalisms. The objective was to emphasize strategies that to a greater extent met the following criteria:

- Previously undocumented;
- Considered to have had some success;
- New and innovative; and
- Drawn from a range of regions, religions, fields of activism and methods.

Our research base

Launched in 2007, the initiative has developed a number of resources based on a survey of over 1,600 women's rights activists from 160 countries, 51 in depth interviews with activists, and additional consultations and research.

In the following months, a six-member selection committee from different continents and fields of work selected 18 cases from an impressive pool of 180 proposals. In some instances, the committee went beyond the prioritized criteria to include studies that provided particularly important concrete illustrations of the way religious fundamentalisms operate. The case study authors then worked with a diverse group of reviewers and with AWID's editorial assistance to draft their final case studies.

This collection covers a diversity of contexts: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mexico, Peru, Serbia and the United States, as well as an overview of Christian fundamentalisms in sub-Saharan Africa. Some case study authors are activists working with specific groups such as LGBTQI people, Indigenous communities, or youth; others work more generally on women's rights or government policy. Some case studies are situated in rural contexts and others in urban ones. Some authors work within a religious framework as a strategy, and some do not. Some of the activists represented particularly focus on religious fundamentalisms, while others have confronted the phenomenon as part of their broader rights advocacy.

The collection by no means claims to cover all of the significant strategies used to resist and challenge religious fundamentalisms, but we hope that it will help fill a current gap in our understanding of religious fundamentalisms as a global phenomenon by providing in-depth contextualized analysis that is placed within a cross-regional and cross-religious framework.

The remaining limitations of this collection are due to several factors including: the effort to remain within the selection criteria; the nature of an open call for proposals; the virtual means of communications we rely on; and the limitations of AWID's contacts database which, although wide ranging, cannot hope to reach all corners of women's movements.

We were also restricted in our reach by the languages in which we were able to disseminate and receive proposals (English, Spanish, French and Arabic), as well as AWID's limited editorial capacity to facilitate the case study documentation. Also, documentation is not a neutral process but one that is influenced by power dynamics. AWID is an international feminist membership organization that has a certain perspective on the issue of religious fundamentalisms, as well as the institutional means to facilitate the documentation of strategies. This provides the opportunity for activists to pause, reflect on, and write about their activism. On the other hand, the very process of facilitating documentation can also influence the result in both obvious and subtle ways: by the cases we select, the framework for documentation we set out, the terminology we use, the questions we ask of authors, the way we edit the final text. At the same time, no amount of facilitation by AWID would have enabled the case studies to come to light had it not been for the commitment and input by the authors and activists themselves.

The full-length version of each case study is available [online](#). Next to each case study is a brief summary—compiled by AWID and drawn from the full-length case study—that summarizes the context and key strategies from the full case. An overview chapter presenting key insights and trends across the collection of case studies will soon be available online.

It is our hope that this collection will engage and inspire readers, and offer many insights to take away, think about and act upon.

Acknowledgements

AWID would like to thank all the case study authors who have worked with our team over many months to bring their extraordinary experiences to this global platform. We also wish to acknowledge the proposals that were not taken forward as full case studies, but that in many instances helped to enrich other reports produced by the Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms Initiative.

The following are gratefully acknowledged for the time, effort and analysis they contributed to this project:

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Anonymous Contributor

Key Learnings from Feminists on the Frontline: Case Studies of Resisting and Challenging Fundamentalisms

This inspiring collection of 18 case studies is authored by women's rights activists in collaboration with AWID's Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms Initiative. The collection is a testament to the women and men all over the world who have the courage and determination to defy discriminatory norms and values imposed in the name of religion. They have exposed and challenged the ways in which one of the most powerful forces in society—religion—is misused to control human beings and violate their rights. These case studies were undertaken as a response to the demand from women's rights activists for insights and knowledge that could be gleaned from the documentation of concrete manifestations of religious fundamentalisms and the diverse ways feminists have sought to challenge their power.

By virtue of their in-depth and detailed examinations of specific instances of feminist strategizing, these case studies provide new insights as to how women's rights activists are challenging a range of religious fundamentalisms around the world, as well as confirming in greater complexity the knowledge gained from other aspects of AWID's research. Covering a variety of geographical, religious and historical contexts, they add depth and dimension to the knowledge gained from the survey and the in-depth interviews, while collectively shedding light on the varied and creative ways in which women's rights activists seek to protect and promote human rights from attack by religious fundamentalisms.

One of AWID's initial criteria in selecting case studies from the 180 proposals received was that the cases should reflect "success". While not all of the campaigns in this collection necessarily reached their immediate goals, they nevertheless achieved important indirect successes. All of the studies in this collection also reflect a different kind of achievement: the belief that justice and transformation even in the most difficult of circumstances is not only possible, but achievable, even if incrementally day by day.

Argentina (Catholic) *The Death of Ana Maria Acevedo: Rallying Cry for the Women's Movement*
Lucila Puyol and Paula Condrac
Multisectoral Women's Group of Santa Fe

Bolivia (Catholic and Pentecostal Christian) *Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms in Bolivia: The Inclusion of Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the Constitution*
Teresa Lanza Monje
Catholics for the Right to Decide-Bolivia

Brazil (Catholic and Evangelical Christian) *Mass Prosecution for Abortion: Violation of the Reproductive Rights of Women in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil*
Carmen Hein de Campos
Themis Legal and Gender Studies Advisory

Brazil (Catholic and Evangelical Christian) *Religious and Political Fundamentalisms as a Threat to Women's Rights: Challenges in the Legislature in Brazil*
Kauara Rodrigues, Juliano Alessandro, Natalia Mori and Soraya Fleischer
CFEMEA - Centre for Feminist Studies and Advisory Services

Canada (Catholic) *Rural Feminist Activism and Religious Fundamentalism in Nova Scotia, Canada*
Leona English, Lucille Harper, and Betsy MacDonald
Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

India (Hindu) *Religious Fundamentalisms and Communalism: The Case of Sahiyar*
Trupti Shah
Sahiyar (Stree Sanghathan)

Indonesia (Muslim) *Religious Fundamentalisms and Student Life: A View from Indonesia*
Nathanael G. Sumaktoyo and Yuyun Rindiastuti

Iran (Muslim) *Stones Aimed at Us...: An Overview of the Discourse and Strategies of the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign*
Shadi Sadr
Stop Stoning Forever Campaign

Italy (Catholic) *Associazione Luca Coscioni and the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research: An Italian Experience of Resisting Religious Fundamentalisms*
Carmen Sorrentino
Luca Coscioni Association

Lebanon/Middle East and North Africa (Muslim and Christian) *Arab Queer Women and Transgenders Confronting Diverse Religious Fundamentalisms: The Case of Meem in Lebanon*
Nadine M. Meem

Lithuania (Catholic) *Confronting Catholic Fundamentalisms in the Former Soviet Union: The Case of Lithuania*
Virginija Aleksejune, Margarita Jankauskaite and Vilana Pilinkaite-Sotirovic
Center for Equality Advancement

Mexico (Catholic) *Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms in Mexico: The Separation of Church and State and Reaffirmation of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights*
Elizabeth Placido
Catholics for the Right to Decide-Mexico

Mexico (Catholic and Pentecostal Christian)

Religious Fundamentalisms in Indigenous Contexts in Chiapas and the Violation of Women's Rights
Guadalupe Elizalde Molina and Martha Guadalupe Figueroa Mier; edited by Luz Maceira Ochoa
COLEM - Women's Collective of San Cristobal de las Casas

Peru (Catholic)

An Overview of Fundamentalist Groups in Peru
Jaris Mujica and Mauricio Rivera
PROMSEX Centre for the Promotion and Defence of Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Peru (Catholic)

Religious Fundamentalisms and the Therapeutic Abortion Protocol in Arequipa, Peru
Ydalid Rojas Salinas
Regional Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Serbia (Serbian Orthodox)

Challenging the Growing Power of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Public Life: The Case of Women in Black-Serbia
Stasa Zajovic and Katie Mahuron
Women in Black-Serbia

United States (Christian, Pentecostal and Evangelical Christian)

Sexuality, Gender and the Religious Right: Youth Advocacy on LGBT Rights in the United States
Haven Herrin
Soulforce Q

Sub-Saharan Africa (Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical Christian)

Christian Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights in the African Context: Mapping the Terrain
Jessica Horn

The impact of religious fundamentalisms on rights and lives

AWID's survey found that eight out of ten activists from over 160 countries agree that religious fundamentalisms have a negative impact on women's rights and 69% believe that religious fundamentalisms obstruct women's rights more than other political forces. The critical point highlighted by all the case studies and their detailed accounts of feminist strategies of resistance, is the need to document, share, and make visible the impact of religious fundamentalisms with both their context-specific and globally shared manifestations. The impacts of religious fundamentalisms on people's lives, especially women's lives, discussed in these case studies reinforce the findings examined in other publications produced by AWID's Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms Initiative.¹ They can be grouped into the following broad and interconnected impacts that come up across the case studies: A general reduction in women's autonomy accompanied by the reinforcement of rigid gender roles and the normalization of passivity in women;

- Increased violations (by state and non-state actors) of women's rights to bodily autonomy; specifically their sexual autonomy, diversity in expressions of sexuality and orientation, freedom of dress, and reproductive health and rights;
- Increased violence and divisions in society, especially against individuals and groups who challenge fundamentalisms directly (such as rights activists); or individuals who may not consciously be challenging fundamentalisms (such as women who seek abortions or LGBTQI people); or communities stereotyped as the "enemy other" (such as religious and/or ethnic minorities);
- Increased psychological strain on people who do not conform to the fundamentalist ideal;
- Reduced intellectual and scientific freedom, as well as censorship of diverse political views;
- Reduced development and democracy due to increased attacks on women's rights, human rights institutions and the judicial system, as well as growing violence and intolerance in society;
- Increased pressure against rights-based reform of laws and policy, or the proper implementation of rights guaranteed in national constitutions and laws.

Clarifying Concepts: What are “religious fundamentalisms”?

The case studies reiterate findings from other aspects of AWID’s research:² that women’s rights activists have quite varied and nuanced understandings of the term, but nevertheless identify fundamentalisms as having certain common characteristics. These include being: **absolutist and intolerant, anti-women and patriarchal, about the fundamentals of religion, about politics and power, anti-human rights and freedoms, literalist and outmoded, violent, and about culture and tradition.**³

Some cautions in using the term “religious fundamentalisms”

Care needs to be taken to avoid conflating religion with religious fundamentalisms and many of the authors in this collection make this distinction. Religion has room for diverse interpretations, pluralistic thought and the possibility of political transformation and liberation. The following case studies all in some measure address the potentially liberating aspects of religion: Bolivia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lebanon, Mexico, United States, as well as the regional report on sub-Saharan Africa. Understanding the distinctions between religion and religious fundamentalists is particularly important since some of the case studies indicate that religiosity is widespread in various regions. There are other reasons for caution. As reflected in the regional report on Christian fundamentalisms in sub-Saharan Africa, activists’ views on the strategic usefulness of the term often differ. Some feel it is important to have a label that is generally understood across contexts, in order to facilitate resistance and challenge. Others express concern that the fear the term religious fundamentalism generates and the stereotypes it invokes dehumanize fundamentalists and prevent us from engaging with them effectively. The diverging opinions on this matter indicate that levels of comfort and discomfort in using the term may be contextual.

Synthesizing Religious Fundamentalist Strategies from the Case Studies

As a collection, these case studies reveal numerous similarities in the strategies of religious fundamentalists, and the impacts their actions have on women’s human rights around the world. While fundamentalisms may be named and sometimes understood slightly differently in various contexts, their core agendas and the ways in which they operate are very similar. The analysis of fundamentalist discourses and strategies in other publications produced by the Initiative⁴ is substantiated by examples contained in the case studies.

However, the case studies do offer fresh insights into fundamentalist strategizing. An advantage of the case study format is that it allows a

deeper historical and contextual perspective on the issue, unmasking how religious fundamentalisms are a constantly shifting phenomenon; while religious fundamentalist discourses and agendas remain unchanged, their strategies are constantly evolving and adapting. These particular case studies have added to the analysis generated from the online survey and in-depth interviews in two particular areas:

The strategic and powerful combining of religious fundamentalisms with other forms of identity politics such as nationalism, and caste or ethnic identities;

The strategic effort to undermine state secularity and utilize the state machinery (in both formally secular and non-secular states) to advance fundamentalist agendas.

Combining Religion with other identity categories to mobilize power and wield control: The case studies collection is framed as being about contexts where feminists are “resisting and challenging fundamentalisms”—i.e., their focus is broader than religious fundamentalisms alone. These various fundamentalisms may be competing but often they cooperate with a devastating effect. In Bolivia, the Mexican state of Chiapas, India, Lebanon, Lithuania, and Serbia for example, religious fundamentalisms work, not only within the confines of religion and reify not only their own religion, but also use other identity categories (ethnicity, culture, caste, or nationality) to strengthen their influence. In sub-Saharan Africa, Christian fundamentalists work in collaboration with cultural fundamentalists and cultural fundamentalist discourses to reinforce the moral weight of their arguments. The case studies reveal the varied and complex ways religious fundamentalisms build alliances with other fundamentalist sectors in society, such as economic fundamentalisms or military fundamentalisms, in their attempt to gain power and wield influence through their region.

Efforts to undermine state secularity and utilize the state machinery to advance fundamentalists agendas: In this collection of case studies this topic can be broken down into the following subcategories:

Exploiting religion’s legally privileged role: In Argentina and Indonesia, for example, the state is not secular or is only partially secular and religion has a formally acknowledged, privileged role in the formation of public policy. In Argentina, religious fundamentalists use this space to reinforce patriarchal control through direct state influence and control over women’s bodies. While the law permits abortion in the event of danger to the mother’s life or health, doctors and bioethics committees in hospitals seem to be able to withhold potentially lifesaving treatment with impunity. In Indonesia, decentralization has further strengthened the formal role of religion

in public policy by enabling local governments dominated by religious fundamentalists to introduce laws in contradiction with constitutional guarantees.

Subverting formal state secularity: In most countries covered by the case studies (Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, India, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Peru, Serbia, and the United States), the state is formally secular. However, in each instance the case studies provide examples of how this is subverted by religious fundamentalists (either within government or outside) in order to increase their influence.

Misusing the State and public machinery: When the machinery of the State is used to impose religious fundamentalisms there is a different dimension to the severity of its impacts. In Iran's theocracy, state laws establish extreme sanctions for sexual transgressions by women. But the collection has examples where secularity alone is not sufficient protection against fundamentalist misuse of the State machinery to violate rights. In India, under the influence of Hindu fundamentalists, the state bureaucracy and police forces facilitated and took part in attacks on the Muslim minority in Gujarat in the 1990s and 2000s, whereas in Lithuania the threat of withholding state funding for NGOs is a weapon for silencing anti-fundamentalist opposition.

Below are some of the strategies utilized by religious fundamentalists to consolidate their power and effect the changes they seek, which were highlighted in the case studies and substantiate the pattern that emerged elsewhere in AWID's research:

Using women's bodies as a focus of fundamentalist violence:

Without exception, the case studies illustrate how controlling women's bodies is central to religious fundamentalist strategies, as women play a dual role both as reproducers of the community and as symbols of family, community and religious "honour". Religious fundamentalists seek to control the mobility, dress, sexuality, and reproductive rights of women of their own community, and in some contexts (India and Chiapas, Mexico) consider sexual assaults on women of other groups as one of the most effective strategies for attacking the community as a whole.

Emphasizing rigid gender roles, a socially conservative or patriarchal vision of the family, and heterosexuality: In Canada, Indonesia, Lithuania, and Peru (PROMSEX) for example, these norms are commonly promoted by religious fundamentalists as part of their effort to control women's sexuality and society. For the fundamentalists involved, the case study campaigns were a direct challenge to their discourses.

Intolerance of diversity and opposition: In all the case studies, fundamentalists show themselves to be intolerant of political and social diversity, and particularly intolerant of cultural and sexual diversity. This intolerance is commonly manifested as psychological violence, such as in Mexico where the Catholic hierarchy threatens to excommunicate those who work for sexual and reproductive health rights. In Canada, Lebanon, sub-Saharan Africa and the United States for example, those who oppose fundamentalist actors find themselves labelled and thus delegitimized as "radical" or "Western" or "unnatural", while in Peru and Bolivia anti-fundamentalist activists are often subjected to defamation, verbal violence and false allegations.

Exploiting democratic, public spaces and co-opting rights language: In Brazil, Canada, and Peru for example, religious fundamentalists ironically exploit democratic spaces such as school boards, student bodies, and civil society groups as an entry point to impose their absolutist vision of morality and discriminatory understanding of rights. Especially in the arena of sexuality and reproductive health, religious fundamentalists co-opt the language of rights—the "right to life"—to undermine rights. This is particularly visible in Italy and Latin America, and is also reflected in NGOs that support a fundamentalist agenda but claim rights language in their names, such as the Catholic Civil Rights League mentioned in the case study from Canada.

Using rights language to influence international and regional standards: For more than 15 years fundamentalist forces have systematically obstructed the development of international human rights standards. The case study from Italy illustrates how, from 2001, a group of states strongly influenced by Catholic and Christian fundamentalisms began lobbying for a binding UN convention banning all forms of cloning, with no distinction between reproductive and therapeutic cloning; rights-based resistance succeeded in reducing the proposal to a non-binding declaration.

Claiming moral superiority and co-opting the concepts of "life" and what is "natural": The case study from the United States discusses the Religious Right's claim that it has the authority to set moral standards for all people, while the sub-Saharan Africa regional report notes the effort of fundamentalist Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic groups to establish their vision of morality as normative. In Argentina and Peru for example, religious fundamentalists have exploited the positive associations with the concepts of "life" and what is "natural" in order to achieve the very opposite effect—the deaths of countless women due to unsafe abortions and life-saving treatment being denied to pregnant women.

Playing upon people's hopes, fears: Several of the case studies illustrate how fundamentalists exploit people's hopes and concerns to strengthen their mobilization. In sub-Saharan Africa for example, the newer generation of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches offer a "theology of prosperity" claiming that the accumulation of material wealth is not antithetical to religion in order to exploit people's material desires. Frequently, the most vulnerable members of society, such as the poor, are purposefully singled out and made the focus of religious fundamentalist campaigns, such as in Lithuania where the rapid pace of post-Soviet economic and social change created uncertainty that fundamentalists were prepared to exploit.

Using alliances across religious boundaries and transnational linkages: All of the case studies provide examples of how religious fundamentalists build alliances. These take diverse forms and include partnerships with conservative politicians and parties as well as with fundamentalists from different religions. In Canada for example, Catholic fundamentalist opponents of sex education programs received key campaigning support from the predominantly Protestant Christian Right in the United States. Case studies from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Lebanon, Mexico, and Peru highlight the importance of transnational linkages for religious fundamentalist power.

A synthesis of feminist strategies for resisting and challenging religious fundamentalism

The case studies presented in this section highlight a number of strategies used by feminist activists to challenge the rise of religious fundamentalisms. Although each strategy is analyzed separately here, they are often used in combination with each other and the categories are not always so distinct in practice. Furthermore, the rise of religious fundamentalisms is experienced differently in each of the case studies, depending upon the issues and the wider national context, and this difference in experience shapes the focus of the case studies. In some, the rise in religious fundamentalisms has led feminists to focus on protecting and enforcing existing rights and policies. In others the focus has been on reform of existing laws and the introduction of new policies to expand rights. But these are generalized categories, and it should be noted that the strategies of expanding rights or defending rights should not be seen as separate tactics, but as different moments of the same process.

Strategies relating to movement-building and mobilizing

Building the capacity of women's rights movements

Depending upon the scope permitted in the context, activists may focus on training themselves—for example, Meem's weekly trainings which provide its members arguments, education, and a sense of confidence; or activists may also reach out to a broader audience. In Italy, the Associazione Luca Coscioni (ALC) runs a summer school on liberalism and free research and promotes Scolarmente, a project targeting high schools and aimed at improving knowledge of the scientific method as an instrument for critical thinking and democratic processes. In the Peru case study, PROMSEX builds the capacity of activists by training other organizations on how fundamentalists operate in their country. The other Peruvian case study reveals how activists of the Foro Regional por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos challenge fundamentalisms after attending a PROMSEX training seminar. These examples detail how capacity-building can be seen as a form of resistance in itself.

Women in Black-Serbia's example is representative of the range of methods mentioned in many of the case studies to build their own capacity, as well as the capacity of allied civil society organizations, to resist and challenge fundamentalisms. Women in Black uses diverse formats: seminars, trainings, lectures, panel discussions and debates, interactive exhibitions, documentaries, film screenings, and publishing. Soulforce Q's rigorous preparation for its Equality Rides⁵ additionally entails learning about how to speak to the media, planning and recruitment for events and rallies, and use of non-violent communication skills. They also consider it "a difficult but necessary task" to examine internalized sexism, racism, and classism and discuss oppression within the group. Thus self-reflection becomes an essential step towards building the capacity of women's rights movements to resist.

Feminist movement-building and multigenerationality

In India's Gujarat state, Sahiyar's experience of community leadership trainings in peace and justice for grassroots women shows the intersections between capacity-building and movement-building. Grassroots leaders need mutual support networks for resistance to be sustained, so Sahiyar complemented its first round of capacity-building by training a second group of women, who together have formed their own informal organization, Buland Awaaz (Powerful Voice).

Several of the case studies highlight the need to ensure resistance is multigenerational. This begins with understanding the specific experiences of younger woman, as in Women in Black's 2008 research focus. In the context of Pentecostal and charismatic Christian

fundamentalisms in sub-Saharan Africa, women's rights activists stress that women's rights movements are not doing enough to reach out to young people in order to nurture them and build their understanding and leadership.

Taking care of the individual

It was to be expected that feminist counterstrategies would entail attempts to influence public policy through collective action, but what these case studies reveal is that many feminist strategies also focus on personalized approaches and individual solidarity. This provides a strong response to the fundamentalist strategy of meeting people's individual needs and thus securing buy-in for fundamentalist movements.

Strategies seeking to influence individual behaviour necessarily entail engaging with people who may be influenced by fundamentalists. These initiatives range in scope from small-scale, very informal approaches to larger, more systematic efforts by well-established organizations. The activist response has been to use a one-on-one approach which leverages established friendships to discuss and debate the idea of freedom.

There is evidence from the case studies that the individual approach also facilitates the process of challenging the boundaries erected by fundamentalisms. Through the personal relationships forged within the group, Meem is able to connect across the divides between some of Lebanon's 18 different religious communities which strengthens members' ability to challenge their own community's prejudices. This shows how even small-scale feminist movement-building can begin to challenge some of the most intractable divisions in society.

Awareness-raising and building public support

Case studies from Argentina, the State of Chiapas in Mexico and Iran—involving respectively a young woman who could not receive cancer treatment due to a denial of the right to abortion, women raped as part of a community conflict in which religion was deeply implicated, and women sentenced to stoning for alleged sexual misconduct—show an interesting cross-over from individual approaches to broader advocacy. In each, the impact of religious fundamentalisms on individual women was used as an entry point for a broader discussion on systemic fundamentalist discrimination against women. The case study from Iran specifically discusses how this strategic approach provided opportunities to raise awareness among an audience that was otherwise not so receptive to feminist analysis.

The vital elements in building public support for counter movements are clearly visible in many of the case studies. Indeed, public

demonstrations, seminars, meetings, leafleting and petitions feature in most of the case studies as a means of raising awareness about religious fundamentalisms, increasing the visibility of resistance, building public support and energizing counter movements. They are designed to reach out to a local audience but also to achieve wider visibility, especially via media coverage (discussed below). Such public mobilization can also be designed to force democratic institutions to respond to public demand. The ALC in Italy, for example, has a petition addressed to the Italian Parliament (supported by over 20,000 signatories at the time of publication) that demands a national survey on the practice of clandestine euthanasia in Italy, which it is anticipated will provide the empirical basis for a change in policy.

Building national and international alliances

Without exception, the case studies highlight the importance of building alliances and working relationships with like-minded civil society groups and politicians in the struggle to resist religious fundamentalisms. The only differences are regarding the scope of the alliances and the extent to which these are formal or informal, all determined by the specifics of the context.

Thus in Iran there was an unwritten coalition with political pragmatists and religious reformists in the government in the struggle to secure the repeal of provisions for stoning. This brought essential theological legitimacy to the demand for the repeal, which feminists could not themselves provide. In contrast, in Bolivia *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir* (CDD - Catholics for the Right to Decide)⁶ is able to build visible alliances with a wide range of partners, as well as the media and a host of other social organizations as well as allies among legislators on various commissions in the Constituent Assembly. In Canada, the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) has prioritized building positive working relationships with parents, academics, healthcare providers, and local women's religious orders, enabling it to call upon support from organizations and individuals across the province when under attack.

Many of the case studies relate how feminists have been instrumental in forming broader alliances with other activists who resist fundamentalisms, not only to strengthen their own ability to challenge fundamentalist actors, but also in recognition of the deeply intertwined nature of various struggles. For example, Meem's members in Lebanon work on women's rights, socio-economic inequalities, Arab solidarity and anti-racism advocacy, just as they work on their rights as queer people. For Sahiyar in India, recognizing the common ground between women and Dalits⁷ was an important ideological stance to recognize. In Bolivia, feminists worked with Indigenous women to address fundamentalist

trends in Indigenous communities that were a result of Christian evangelizing and the Indigenous people's own beliefs. Feminists in Mexico have been very successful in building alliances to resist fundamentalisms through a very broad range of alliances with those defending and supporting the secular state, which has gathered diverse actors from civil society, political parties, intellectuals, and progressive religious groups.

Many of the case studies also highlight international linkages and networking. Women in Black and CDD are extensive international networks linking local branches, while Meem is part of the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR). For feminists in Iran, international alliances proved critical to their ability to raise the visibility and concerns of the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign.

Strategies related to knowledge, information and communication

Research and documentation

The case studies illustrate three broad categories of research and documentation, each of which makes a vital contribution to challenging fundamentalisms.

The first category involves the key step of documenting and then analyzing the impacts and strategies of religious fundamentalisms, using this both to inform feminist counter-strategizing and to build a broader response by sharing the information on impacts with a wider audience. In Gujarat, India, Sahiyar (in collaboration with the Women's Studies Research Centre of a local University) conducted a small study designed to understand Hindu and Muslim women's perspectives on communal violence and shape Sahiyar's counter-strategies. During fieldwork it recorded examples of the impact on workers and women vendors who lost their daily income during curfews due to fundamentalist violence, as well as examples of how control over women and girls increases during and in the aftermath of communal riots, limiting their education, career and livelihood options. The report was prepared in Gujarati and English, the latter being used to reach out and influence state bodies such as the National Women's Commission, the Human Rights Commission, as well as people outside Gujarat.

The second category includes documenting women's lived realities which is vital as a strategy for countering the fundamentalist vision and claims about people's lives. In Serbia, Women in Black's survey traces actual reproductive health practices among women which enables it to question the Orthodox Church's sweeping claims about popular support for its

positions. In collaboration with other organizations, CFEMEA in Brazil organized a training to present the results of a study on the reality of unsafe abortion in maternity hospitals in the northeast of the country, which demonstrated the real cost of the criminalization of abortion on women's lives and which provided empirical support for its lobbying position for decriminalization of abortion.

The third category entails documenting feminist strategizing. The Themis case study from Brazil was specifically designed to document, analyze and learn from the experience of women's rights activists in countering the mass prosecution of women by fundamentalist forces in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul.

Providing alternative narratives and countering the fundamentalist grip on information

Providing alternative sources of information is strategically vital for countering the fundamentalist grip on society and people's choices. In Italy, the ALC runs an initiative to help patients and citizens safeguard their rights and liberties through a self-help, interactive online manual, Soccorso Civile - Manuale di autodifesa dal proibizionismo sulla salute (Civil rescue - A self-defence manual against health prohibitionism). The information it provides, which includes details of European centres offering treatments forbidden in Italy, is often unavailable elsewhere due to the Catholic Church's restrictive influence on public information.

Feminists also seek to correct the misinformation spread by fundamentalist movements. For example, Souforce provides facts on the biological and political realities of LGBT people in the United States, and the Meem YouTube channel hosts video clips challenging gender binaries and the criminalization of LGBTQIs in Lebanon. In Peru, the Foro Regional sought to counter the Church's opposition and misinformation regarding a public health protocol permitting therapeutic abortion by widely publicizing the protocol in the media and communicating it to relevant professional associations. Meanwhile in the same context, PROMSEX countered the Church's opposition with a book exposing how fundamentalists organize politically, outlining their links with international institutions and critically examining their discourses.⁸

Beyond providing facts and dispelling misinformation, feminists have also resisted fundamentalisms by generating alternative narratives and counter-discourses (what Women in Black call "writing back") and by creating spaces for critical thinking. In the sub-Saharan Africa context, the African Feminist Forum established in 2006 and its derivative national feminist forums are providing new spaces to tackle the influence of fundamentalisms within the broader gender equality sector. In Iran, the

Stop Stoning Forever Campaign shifted the public discourse on adultery into the broader context of discriminatory policies and practices that adversely affect Iranian women. This humanized the women sentenced to stoning and brought far greater public support for the repeal of stoning provisions.

Unmasking the agendas of religious fundamentalist actors

For the majority of feminist activists, actors such as fundamentalist religious leaders, politicians, charities, and cultural organizations, have an even more significant impact on their work than armed groups, which only 6% of women's rights activists named as fundamentalist actors who influence their work. The actors with the most profound impact on feminist work are those who are often stereotypically not perceived as "fundamentalist". Women's rights activists strategizing to resist fundamentalisms therefore work to unmask their fundamentalist agendas for other activists and for the broader public. Case studies from very different contexts—Brazil, Canada, India and Peru, for instance—include examples of such unmasking.

In Brazil, CFEMEA's first step in holding fundamentalist politicians to account for their agendas that violate human rights and the national Constitution is to research the positions and background profiles of all the deputies and senators at the beginning of each legislature. In Peru, PROMSEX created an Observatory of Anti-Rights Groups, which produces analytical research for rights activists, exposing members of fundamentalist groups, how they organize and how they coordinate their efforts.

Unmasking also entails exposing the hypocrisies and contradictions within fundamentalist positions. Thus in India, Sahiyar raised the question "Why were Hindu fundamentalists, who remain silent on injustices toward Hindu women, making a hue and cry about the rights of Shah Bano?"⁹ This approach also helps to prevent co-optation of feminist critiques of fundamentalisms by the extreme right, racists and other religious fundamentalist movements. In Canada, the AWRC tactically chose not to discuss the actions of individual school board members who were attacking their work. But by building an analysis "with and among their allies that unmasked the fundamentalist ideologies and exposed the collaboration of father's rights groups"¹⁰, the AWRC enabled its allies to identify to the public the ideologies informing the opposition of some of the school board members.

Effective and innovative communications

All of the case studies in their own ways reflect recognition of the significance of effective communications in resisting and challenging

religious fundamentalisms. However, context dictates whether this is through mass media or online community networks or other platforms. Soulforce Q appears to take advantage of the mainstream media's use of controversy and conflict, and reaches out to local and national media, weeks in advance of a campus visit. Appearances on radio and television were also a central part of CDD-Bolivia's strategy designed to sensitize Constituent Assembly members to sexual and reproductive rights issues while the government was drafting a new Bolivian Constitution. In Canada, the AWRC's efforts to build good relationships with local media were paid back when the Centre was able to use the media to inform the public about its programs and counter the misinformation being disseminated by fundamentalist groups.

However, in other contexts security concerns may require a lower profile, or mainstream media is inaccessible due to censorship or control by fundamentalist forces. Meem in Lebanon has opted not to use mass media until its members feel better prepared. Instead, the group creates its own media: members write poetry, stories and essays, document their own histories, do investigative reports and produce their own films. It has recently published a book, *Bareed Mista3jil (Express Mail)* containing 41 anonymous first-person accounts of the lives and experiences of LGBTQI people in Lebanon. For activists in both Iran and Lebanon, online community activism and social networking through blogging, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. have been vital. These virtual avenues have allowed members to remain safe and unidentified while also acting as a vehicle for public and underground organizing, keeping activists connected with each other and with allies across the world.

A number of the case studies detail the innovative communication methods utilized, many of which draw on popular and traditional culture. For example, during the popular annual kite-flying festival in Gujarat, Sahiyar produced kites with slogans against VAW (violence against women) and for communal harmony. Since a single kite will change hands at least four or five times, the message reaches many. A street theatre festival in riot-affected areas of Vadodara city ensured that for the first time since the communal violence in their localities, people from Hindu and Muslim communities stood amongst each other. In Lithuania, where many NGOs are dependent upon the state and are therefore hesitant to criticize the influence of the Catholic Church on the government, the Center for Equality Advancement (CEA) sought to challenge fundamentalist presumptions and imagery surrounding the understanding of "family" by printing Mother's Day postcards that made the link between motherhood and poverty in the Lithuanian context. Amidst the familiar flowery discourse of Mother's Day, CEA's media campaign provided journalists with a unique and unusual angle of interest. Also in Lithuania, in collaboration with a number of

women's rights NGOs, CEA organized a vigil in front of the parliament to protest the rights-restricting Family Concept Bill. Using interesting visuals like a pile of children's toys that also "protested" in front of parliament, music, speeches, and a tongue-in-cheek marriage ceremony, generated much media coverage.

In several case studies, great care is taken to ensure the content of communications materials is in accessible language. Moreover, some consciously target the unconvinced, which can be particularly challenging in terms of avoiding provocative and complex discourses. An example was the inter-campus bulletin, *Warna Bangsa*, produced in Indonesia and designed to target students who were uninterested rather than engaged in politics, while advocating pluralism and opposing fundamentalism.

Strategies related to promoting secularity and rights-based interpretations of religion

The case studies do not answer the question of whether secular strategies or those from within the framework of religion are most appropriate for resisting religious fundamentalisms. Instead, they point to a broad spectrum of strategies that include variations on both approaches as well as combinations that appear to avoid "either/or" choices. Some of the examples may appear surprising—that in Iran's heavily fundamentalist-dominated context activists successfully used secular strategies or that CDD, an organization whose name implies a religious framework, focuses on upholding the secular nature of the state. This indicates that care is needed in some of the labels used in rights activism and some of the presumptions made about different contexts.

Promoting and protecting the secular nature of the state

The case studies reiterate the basic definition of secularism as "the complete separation of Church and State" (for example, Women in Black) and some also elaborate on this. In Serbia, a survey of activists by Women in Black showed a clear preference for strategies that prioritize advocating for secularism as a means to oppose the interference of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other religious communities in state affairs (especially in the spheres of education and culture), and thus protect women's human rights. Such strategies should not be seen as limited to "non-religious" organizations, however; in Mexico, CDD has fought publicly for the upholding of the principle of separation of Church and State in the face of recent aggressive attempts to undermine the principle.

In some of the case studies, the strategy of promoting secularism involves protecting existing rights and ensuring the state upholds the principle of secularity in practice. For example, since 2007, CDD-Mexico (along

with many other actors) has been calling for an amendment to reinforce Mexico's existing secular Constitution by making churches abide by the law, stopping the State from granting privileges to any particular religion, and making public officials fulfil their human rights obligations. The amendment to the Constitution was achieved on February 10th 2010, with 363 votes in support, only one against, and eight abstentions.

Promoting rights-based interpretations of religion

Some feminists question how promoting secularism can be sufficiently powerful as a strategy against religious fundamentalisms given the dominance of religion over public policy and society. This has led some to promote rights-based interpretations of religion and use religious arguments to support rights, as illustrated in the case studies from Lebanon and the United States. The differences in these two contexts indicate that this strategy is not limited to challenging one particular brand of religious fundamentalism nor is it dependent upon whether or not the state is formally secular.

Within this broad category, there are a variety of strategies. Some of the case study groups themselves use alternative religious approaches: in the United States, as part of their preparatory training Soulforce Q Equality Riders "learn how to neutralize the biblical texts traditionally used to condemn LGBT people" and how to open space for counter-organizing through a critical analysis of scriptures. Others actively seek out religious authorities who support their positions. In Lebanon for example, Meem works to find authorities from all religions who are tolerant towards homosexuality, and in Iran secular activists have an unspoken alliance with pragmatists inside the religious-governmental power structures who oppose governmental religious fundamentalism. Even where a group may not itself use arguments from within the framework of religion, the group may make a clear distinction between religious fundamentalists and other religious people.

Strategies that avoid dichotomizing religion and secularity, or emphasize secularity as inclusive

Some of the case studies clearly reject the "either/or" approach to whether religious or secular strategies are most appropriate for resisting religious fundamentalisms. Member organizations of the CDD network in Latin America in particular have very inclusive definitions of "secularity":

CDD-Bolivia – "Challenging fundamentalisms requires the creation of favourable public opinion, which in turn requires building a solid social base supporting a secular state, women's rights and sexual and reproductive rights. To do so we must be receptive to diversity of thought and ways of seeing life and the world, for example, the world visions of

indigenous and native peoples or the precepts of other churches.”
CDD-Mexico – “The state cannot side with the ethical or moral world vision of any specific religion, for example Catholicism, but must rather respect the plurality of ideas and visions that comprise society, that Mexicans can believe in any religion or none, and that this shall not be taken as motive for discrimination or exclusion.”

In India, the rise in fundamentalisms in the 1990s and increasing divisions in society meant that some in local women’s movements believed activists from outside each religious community should not “intervene” on behalf of that community’s women due to the idea that “reform can only come from within.” But this meant leaving minority women alone to fight the patriarchal-fundamentalist forces within their own communities. Sahiyar resolved this dilemma by deliberately rejecting the dichotomized choice between religious or secular strategies and (while retaining its secular identity) joined a network focused on women’s rights in Muslim communities that used a combination of strategies.

Other strategies downplay the importance of the “either/or” question itself by instead strategically focusing on the socio-economic realities of women’s daily lives. In Lithuania, the CEA pointed out the reality that families are not always male-dominated heterosexual unions between two spouses, and that laws that presume this would be inevitably discriminatory.

It is significant that in two of the case study contexts where religious fundamentalists have considerable influence (Indonesia and Iran), women’s rights activists focus on secular strategies in their own work, but at the same time recognize the limitations this may have. In other words, at least in the case studies presented here, many feminist strategies involve varying combinations of religious and secular approaches.

Strategies related to holding the state and politicians to account

Across regions and religions, the case studies clearly illustrate how feminists have been holding states (including the police and local administrations) and politicians to account for fundamentalist agendas that violate rights already guaranteed in theory at the national or international levels.

Holding the state to account

Several of the strategies that relate to holding the state accountable involve public interest or test case litigation, a strategy that seems particularly common in Latin America. In Argentina, the Multisectoral

Women’s Group of Santa Fe brought a criminal suit against the medical personnel and hospital bioethics committee members who, in violation of the availability of therapeutic abortion under the Penal Code, had not permitted a legal abortion for Ana María Acevedo, a young woman diagnosed with cancer who was denied an abortion and treatment for her disease. It also brought a civil suit against the Province of Santa Fe and its healthcare providers.

In addition to using national laws and local policies as a tool for accountability, the case studies show how regional and international law is also used both as a space for challenge and as a reference point strengthening and inspiring local activism. In 2006, the ALC launched a petition calling on the European Parliament to ensure the allocation of funds for research on stem cells and secured several high profile signatories including 11 Nobel Prize winners.

In addition to using the legal system, feminists have other ways of holding the State to account. Iranian feminists, for instance, use their international networking to put external pressure on the fundamentalist Iranian state, while in Peru a regional alliance was mobilized with the aim of holding public health authorities to their promise to uphold the law and permit therapeutic abortion. Thus networking and mobilizing are an integral part of the process of holding States accountable.

In some contexts, holding the State to account has entailed a measure of collaboration rather than confrontation with the State. In order to pressurize the local police and administration to protect all citizens, Sahiyar was part of a group of activist organizations that offered to help maintain peace in their city; the authorities were given contact details for activists who could provide authentic information on communal incidents, “but in response, we expected immediate action on the part of police and administration.” To hold the authorities to their part of the bargain, each call reporting an incident to the police was followed by a fax to the Police Commissioner recording the content of the telephone conversation.

Holding politicians to account

One of the most challenging situations for feminists has been the fundamentalist penetration of democratic and apparently secular spaces such as mainstream politics. In this context, it has also been vital to hold politicians, individually and collectively, to account under national laws. The CFEMEA study from Brazil, for instance, provides a detailed example of how feminists monitor the legislative positions and personal behaviour of national politicians, publicizing for example the unconstitutional visibility of religion inside the legislature (including readings from the Bible, holding masses and “pro-life” meetings, and

observers holding prayer sessions in the gallery).

Civil disobedience and challenging the invincibility of religious fundamentalisms

The 18 case studies are inspiring for their very clear and decisive illustration of the determined nature of feminist resistance, even under the most difficult circumstances of non-state violence, censorship, state aggression, impunity, and a comparative lack of resources. This supports the findings elsewhere in AWID's research that religious fundamentalisms are not invincible.

This determination is often reflected in the form of non-violent civil disobedience, through which rights activists turn power imbalances on their head and achieve an impact far beyond their relative weight in terms of resources. Case studies from India, Italy, Serbia, and the United States provide examples of a variety of forms of civil disobedience, each with slightly different strategic aims. In many contexts, as in Italy, unjust laws that restrict women's reproductive rights are resisted through the provision of alternative information (such as the ALC's support for "health tourism" in vitro fertilization (IVF) visits abroad), and through legal advocacy support to women and medical professionals prosecuted under unjust laws.

For Soulforce Q in the United States, "as a matter of principle, we cannot accept no as an answer to our request for dialogue with a school.¹¹ Some Equality Riders even feel it appropriate to risk trespass when necessary." The case study authors point to several reasons why Equality Riders consider breaking the law: "most of us believe that if we do not challenge a school's rejection, then nothing will change." Moreover, the colleges are pushed into dialogue with the organization so as to avoid adverse media publicity. "Being will to risk civil disobedience creates the space for dialogue that would not occur otherwise."

Meanwhile in Serbia, Women in Black have long used the very public aspect of civil disobedience as a means of making a powerful statement when other avenues for public debate have been closed off. One street action involved activists removing items of clothing while standing in front of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Belgrade. This was a form of peaceful resistance that questioned the Church's public stance on "appropriate clothing" for women and its right to dictate what women can and cannot wear in public.

In Gujarat, India, where the movement for independence from colonial rule was marked by a strong tradition of non-violent resistance, in 2002 people courted arrest in order to force the police into investigating

allegations that police personnel influenced by Hindu fundamentalist tendencies had assaulted Muslim women during search operations. For some of the Muslim women who took part in this civil disobedience, "The experience of arrest alleviated their feelings of helplessness and frustration, and raising their voices against injustice gave them confidence."

Looking ahead and feminist responses to current challenges

In addition to detailing past and existing feminist strategies, the 18 case studies also looked ahead and discussed some suggestions for how to respond to future challenges, both in terms of women's rights organizing as well as in a wider context.

The challenges ahead

The case studies provide a highly context-specific picture of the circumstances in which activists are grappling with the rise of fundamentalisms, but it is possible to identify certain patterns in the experiences recounted that are cause for concern.

While the tone of some of the case studies is optimistic and recognizes that fundamentalisms are not invincible, the studies confirm the finding across AWID's research that religious fundamentalisms are on the rise and are forging effective transnational alliances which increase their local influence. The rapid growth of Evangelical Christian fundamentalisms in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America are highlighted in the case studies. The case studies show how in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, religious fundamentalists have come to national and local power through the ballot box; often in the shape of politicians who blur the line between "fundamentalist" and "conservative", and "religious" and "secular." This complicates the process of unmasking fundamentalist actors and agendas as well as the process of building broad-based alliances to resist their strategizing. More challenging is the trend, particularly noted in the context of Latin America, whereby even apparently left-leaning governments are bargaining away women's rights, in particular their sexual and reproductive rights, in order to secure support from powerful religious lobbies and thereby protect their political interests.

Where women's rights organizations are dependent upon the State for their funding, as in Lithuania and parts of Africa, and the State is increasingly under fundamentalist influence, the effect has been to silence NGO critiques and render opposition voices even more isolated. Case studies from Asia and Africa note that at times women's rights movements have failed to respond adequately to support those feminists who resist religious fundamentalisms, in some instances

because women's movements have themselves been influenced by fundamentalist discourses. In Latin America the critique is that the response from women's rights movements has been lacking in coherence and consensus.

The scale of fundamentalist resources is enormous as compared to under-resourced women's rights movements. This is in terms of money, political power, access to the state machinery (including the education system, police and courts), control over media and information, and social influence—which all inevitably bring with them greater numbers of both active and passive supporters. Religious fundamentalists have been reinforced by the social divisions brought about by economic crises and national conflict, and also through their historical opposition to authoritarian governments.

Some proposed feminist responses

What do these challenges, some of which are to a large extent beyond the direct control of women's rights movements, mean for feminist strategizing? How should feminists lay the groundwork that enables them to act most effectively when opportunities arise? How can feminists use their limited resources most strategically in their work to challenges fundamentalisms? The responses contained in the case studies generally complement AWID's report [*Towards a Future without Fundamentalisms: Analyzing Religious Fundamentalist Strategies and Feminist Responses*](#).

Share experiences and knowledge across regions and religions:

The commonalities in fundamentalist strategizing and their negative impact on women's rights, as well as the similarities in successful feminist counter-strategies point to the potential benefits of a deeper and broader cross-fertilization of strategies across regions and religions.

More of the same for successful strategies: Many of the strategies discussed in the case studies have successfully prevented deeper attacks on women's human rights, expanded these rights, or ensured that the space for alternative visions remains open. Most of this impact has been despite the comparatively lesser resources available for feminist action. Evidently, women's rights activists are getting something right and need to build on these achievements. They can also learn from aspects of the case studies that were less successful, especially where for example fundamentalist control of the legal system can lead to unintended consequences.

Research and expose how fundamentalisms maintain and increase their power: In challenging fundamentalist forces and constructing

counter strategies, the forward-looking strategy most commonly suggested by the case studies was the need to understand all the facets of how religious fundamentalisms work and maintain their power. This strategy is especially needed in regards to tracking the most rapidly spreading forms of fundamentalisms such as Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian fundamentalisms in Latin America and Africa, as well as monitoring transnational fundamentalist networking and the complex interplay between various conflicting and cooperating fundamentalisms. Unmasking the workings of religious fundamentalisms, including those actors who might not stereotypically be labelled "fundamentalist" also forms a crucial basis for several of the other forward-looking strategies mentioned below, including

Joint efforts with other social movements: Religious fundamentalisms undermine the human rights of all who do not share their social and political power or vision; they limit pluralism and thereby damage democratic processes. Given this wide impact, there is scope for broadening debate and strengthening alliances between women's rights movements and other rights-based social movements such as LGBTQI groups, human rights organizations, the scientific community and patient advocacy groups. It includes cultivating new alliances, including with rights-based religious groups wherever applicable, to produce even stronger counter-strategizing.

Greater consensus among women's rights activists: Some of the case studies point to a need for a greater consensus on strategies and a more coordinated advocacy approach among feminists themselves, while for others a prior step is to secure more support from fellow women's rights activists and women's movements for work to challenge fundamentalisms.

Build a mass base: Several of the case studies indicate that describing and exposing fundamentalist agendas is insufficient in itself. What are also needed are efforts to build a mass base for women's rights movements including ensuring a critical mass of silent support. This involves broadening feminist engagement to reach out to grassroots women whose often radical positions are gained through everyday life experience of the impact of fundamentalisms. It also involves reaching out to young women as well as to sympathetic men.

Understand and respond to the appeal of fundamentalist movements: While fundamentalist forces need to be tackled head-on in the elite decision-making and policy-making spheres, feminists also suggest that they need to do more to respond to the appeal of

fundamentalist forces wherever they have a measure of popular support. This involves responding to individual people's needs as well as distinguishing between fundamentalist elites and followers, and engaging with the latter.

Confront the challenges posed by labels: There is a need for further thinking and analysis regarding the terms feminists use in identifying and labelling fundamentalist actors and agendas. This is especially so if feminists are to recognise the opportunities for engaging with some who are influenced by religious fundamentalisms but who could potentially move towards more rights-based positions or at least begin questioning fundamentalisms.

Provide positive visions for our collective future: A strengthened future feminist response to fundamentalisms includes a stronger and more positive discursive response to the desperation, discrimination and alienation experienced by many people today. This involves offering of an attractive alternative vision of hope and especially reclaiming ideas of community, culture, and what is moral behaviour.

Address power differentials within and between women's rights movements: Self-reflection and analysis of power differentials are part of the process towards building a mass base. As reflected in many of the case studies, a constant appraisal and self-awareness of privilege and internalized prejudice within organizations confronting religious fundamentalisms is a necessary part of movement building and effective strategizing in the struggle.

Efforts to communicate more accessibly and effectively: Building on the creative communications work already highlighted in the case studies, feminists recommend further efforts to make critical analysis of fundamentalisms more accessible, especially using popular language.

Plug the visible gaps in feminist presence: In response to the fundamentalist occupation of strategic spaces, feminists need to identify these strategic spaces and ensure that they too have a visible presence. An example is bioethics committees at the national, regional and international levels.

Conclusion

We hope readers will draw inspiration from the 18 case studies and that they help to build a picture of a politics of possibility and transformation, and enable us to collectively imagine and bring about a world without the discrimination and divisions of religious fundamentalisms.

AWID's research reveals that religious fundamentalisms are gaining power and momentum throughout the world and the feminists on the frontline of the fight against them must be actively supported in their commitment to defending and protecting human rights. These case studies, while varied in strategy, geography, and context, all reveal the serious impacts on lives and rights that religious fundamentalisms are having around the planet. Whether it is by denying women the right to control their own sexuality and reproductive capacity, or through planned attacks of rape and violence, women are too often used as tools by religious fundamentalists to inflict their beliefs and values on society. The vast majority of women's rights activists surveyed by AWID believe that fundamentalist actors have a profoundly negative impact on the lives of women, and unfortunately, their power is continuing to grow.

These case studies detail how feminist activists continue to stay one step ahead of the constantly shifting strategies of the religious fundamentalists in order to combat their growing influence and authority. The wide range of strategies and techniques covered in the case studies reveal just how much creativity and innovation is required to deal with such a powerful force in society. Feminists must continue to refine their techniques while building alliances with other social movements, inspiring a broad base of mass support, and securing more support from donors. Religious fundamentalists present a powerful foe, and it will be necessary for women's rights activists to continue documenting their actions, revealing their strategies, sharing their own struggles and experiences, and fomenting powerful partnerships with other activists in order to protect and promote human rights.

*Shareen Gokal,
Rosanna Barbero,
Cassandra Balchin*

Endnotes:

¹ Cassandra Balchin, *Religious Fundamentalisms on the Rise: A case for action*, Toronto: AWID, 2008; Cassandra Balchin, *Exposed: Ten myths about religious fundamentalisms*, Toronto: AWID, 2008.

² [Resisting and Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms / AWID Initiatives / About AWID / Home - AWID](#)

³ Juan Marco Vaggione (2008) *Shared Insights: Women's Rights Activists Define Religious Fundamentalisms*, Toronto: AWID, 5.

⁴ In particular, Cassandra Balchin, *Towards a Future without Fundamentalisms: Analyzing Religious Fundamentalist Strategies and Feminist Responses*, Toronto: AWID, 2011.

⁵ In 2006, Soulforce organized the first Equality Ride, a two-month cross-country bus trip to 19 colleges that actively discriminate against openly LGBT students. Thirty-three young adults made the journey. Soulforce Q, the youth component of Soulforce, was founded as a result of the first Equality Ride and is based on the belief that sustained and coordinated nationwide activism is an essential component of the LGBT rights movement.

⁶ Catolicas por el Derecho a Decidir (CDD) or Catholics for the Right to Decide is the name of the Latin American network working on reproductive health issues and founded in Costa Rica in 1986. Catholics for Choice (CFC, or sometimes Catholics for a Free Choice, CFFC) is the organization originally established in the United States in 1973. More information about the network in the Americas is available here: www.catholicsforchoice.org/about/international/.

⁷ Dalits are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, which perpetuates their socio-economic position as a poor, downtrodden section of society. The Hindu social order considers them “untouchables.” They constitute 16% of India’s population and 7.1 % of Gujarat’s population.

⁸ Jaris Mujica, *Economía Política del Cuerpo. La reestructuración de los Grupos Conservadores y el Biopoder*, Lima: PROMSEX, 2007.

⁹ The Shah Bano case refers to the famous case of a Muslim divorcee who was denied maintenance and threatened with destitution on account of Muslim fundamentalist interpretations of her rights.

¹⁰ Fathers’ rights groups in the North American context generally lobby and organize on issues of family law, child custody and child support. Some of these groups argue that men are disadvantaged by the legal and judicial system, which they contend discriminates against fathers in cases of divorce and custody.

¹¹ Note that in the United States the term “school” is used for various levels of educational institutions, including colleges and universities.

Feminists on the Frontline: Case Study Summaries

Confronting Catholic Fundamentalisms in the Former Soviet Union: The Case of Lithuania

Center for Equality Advancement (Lygių galimybių pletros centras)
**Virginija Aleksejūnė, Margarita Jankauskaitė
and Vilana Pilinkaitė-Sotirovičs**

Context

In less than 20 years, Lithuania has undergone considerable social, economic and political transformation, evolving from a Soviet republic into an economically weakened state, then into an increasingly prosperous nation before finally acceding to the European Union (EU) in 2004. In what has been experienced by many as rapid and often destabilizing change, the Catholic Church has sought to provide a sense of continuity and familiarity. EU-driven campaigns to promote diversity and eliminate discrimination against minorities and non-traditional families are often interpreted as threats to Lithuanian statehood, and have been met by fundamentalist calls to preserve the traditional family and marriage as a national cultural value.

The Center for Equality Advancement

Established in 2003, the Center for Equality Advancement (CEA) is a non-profit organization that seeks to promote values of an open democratic society by encouraging gender dialogue, promoting tolerance, reducing social exclusion and combating discrimination based on sex, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. CEA conducts seminars, organizes public campaigns, publishes research, and develops recommendations to improve policies around gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion.

CEA, like other NGOs in Lithuania, has had to confront a range of factors that hinder progressive campaigns against fundamentalist politics, including limited resources, reliance on government funding, and a lack of cooperation among civil society organizations. When Lithuania joined the EU in 2004, the flow of funds from foreign donors decreased sharply. Many NGOs, now heavily dependent on the Lithuanian state, are hesitant to criticize the government or the Catholic Church, as these institutions are closely connected. The suppression of individual political activism during the Soviet era has also resulted in a lack of critical or progressive organizing at the grassroots level. With the exception of the Catholic Church, which is politically active and enjoys the support of a majority of the population, few advocacy organizations are able to draw a large membership base and therefore must make the most strategic use of their limited resources.

The Impacts of Catholic Fundamentalisms

Between 2007 and 2009, reactionary forces strengthened their hold on social and political institutions in Lithuania. While the Constitution declares the secularity of the State, in practice the Catholic Church has a critical impact on the nation's social politics. Claiming to defend traditional families and national values, politicians and organizations with conservative, Christian Democratic, and populist leanings have worked to deepen systemic discrimination against minorities, homosexuals, and single and unmarried mothers, for instance by supporting the Catholic Church in its successful lobbying to obtain an exemption from the Law on Equal Opportunities for any religious organization or institution. In 2008, the minister of justice and a group of parliamentarians initiated the passing of a law entitled the Protection of the Embryo in the Prenatal Phase under which abortion would be legal only in cases of rape or incest or if the mother's life or health was in danger. Fundamentalist influences also halted the passage of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Concept bill, despite the dramatic incidence of domestic violence in Lithuania.

Strategies

In 2008, the Lithuanian Parliament began debating the National Family Policy Concept bill, which defines as state subjects only those families based on the marriage of a man and a woman and openly discriminates against single mothers and non-traditional families. In response, CEA responded with a number of strategic actions.

Media: CEA sought to focus media attention on the bill. It printed Mother's Day postcards that made the link between motherhood and

poverty in the Lithuanian context. Amidst the familiar flowery discourse of Mother's Day, CEA's media campaign provided journalists with unique imagery and unusual angles of interest.

Public demonstration: In collaboration with a number of women's rights NGOs, CEA organized a vigil in front of the Parliament to protest the bill. The visual elements of the demonstration generated much media coverage. Music, speeches, and a tongue-in-cheek wedding ceremony were key elements of the protest, as was a pile of children's toys sporting slogans that urged parliamentarians to stop discriminating against women and children.

Appeal to common values: CEA strategically appealed to a common concern for child welfare, stressing that the bill would be detrimental to children of single mothers or other non-traditional families.

Critical dialogue: The demonstration drew the attention of journalists and progressive intellectuals. Numerous articles and editorials were devoted to the bill and its consequences, and on several occasions CEA staff were approached for comments and analysis. Although the bill ultimately passed, the campaign did serve to catalyze critical dialogue on the issue, which became important during the parliamentary election and the formation of the new ruling coalition in 2008.

Looking Ahead

In the Lithuanian context, the Catholic Church presents itself as the only institution that openly opposed Soviet rule, as a defender of the national identity, and as a bastion of support for the traditional family. This positioning allows it to reject any opposition as amoral and threatening to the nation and its social fabric. Thus, effective strategizing to oppose the Church requires meeting the challenge of formulating a strong moral position that can potentially appeal to more populist sectors.

Recognizing the role that religion and spirituality play in personal, social and political spheres, CEA is keen to increase grassroots organizing to shift public opinion away from fundamentalist influences and agendas, and to engage in more effective outreach and dialogue on common goals with moderate elements within the Catholic Church and society at large. Consolidated civil society efforts and proactive fundraising efforts are also critical to effective and sustainable counter-fundamentalist strategies in Lithuania.

www.gap.lt

Mass Prosecution for Abortion: Violation of the Reproductive Rights of Women in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil

Themis - Assessoria Jurídica e Estudos de Gênero
Carmen Hein de Campos

Context

The Brazilian feminist movement began fighting for the decriminalization of abortion in the 1970s and gained strength at the end of the 1990s. However, at the same time that feminism was making advances, the fundamentalist movement was also organizing in Brazil. One important example is the case against 1,500 women accused of having had abortions in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. The case was instigated by Christian and Catholic fundamentalist parliamentarians as described by Themis in this case study.

The World Health Organization (WHO) argues that unsafe abortion is one of the greatest public health problems and the one that receives the least amount of attention in the Global South, putting women's lives at risk. According to the Ministry of Health, in 2008 in Brazil, almost 250,000 women were admitted to the Public Health System for post-abortion care. Additionally, unsafe abortion is the fourth leading cause of maternal death in Brazil. The Brazilian Penal Code only allows abortion when the pregnancy is the result of rape or to save the life of the woman; however, very few abortions are actually performed on these two grounds and very few hospitals offer legal abortion services due to pressure from religious fundamentalists not to implement even these minimum grounds for abortion.

Themis

Themis - Assessoria Jurídica e Estudos de Gênero (Legal Advice and Gender Studies) is a non-governmental feminist legal organization that advocates for the rights of women, based in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It is a member of the Jornadas pelo Direito ao Aborto Legal e Seguro (Conference for the Right to Legal and Safe Abortion), a network of feminist organizations and women working in a coordinated way to decriminalize abortion in Brazil.

Opposition

The criminalization of abortion is maintained due to the pressure of fundamentalist movements, and especially parliamentarians with links to the Catholic and Evangelical churches united in the National Congress in a parliamentary bloc that aims to prevent the decriminalization of abortion (this issue is examined in depth in the case study by CFEMEA - Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria/Centre for Feminist Studies and Advisory Services).

The state of Mato Grosso do Sul has one of the highest recorded rates of maternal mortality and clandestine abortion in Brazil. In April 2007, a judge in that state decided to prosecute the owner of a family planning clinic and 1,500 women who had allegedly had abortions at her clinic. This is the largest mass prosecution of women orchestrated by religious fundamentalists in Latin America. The criminal proceedings began with the confiscation of more than 10,000 medical records of patients; at last count, more than 300 women have been sentenced to community service in nurseries and pre-schools. The strategy used by the police to raid a family planning clinic and confiscate medical records set a dangerous legal precedent.

Strategies

Field research: A delegation from Brazilian feminist organizations that are a part of the Jornadas network went to Campo Grande (capital of Mato Grosso do Sul State) to obtain information about the case. The activists spoke with public officials and with the local women's movement and produced a report that they shared with the Jornadas network as the basis for jointly deciding on what strategies to pursue.

Procedural legal strategy: The Jornadas network questioned in court the validity of the proceedings on the basis of a series of procedural errors, including the handling of medical records by the police (not by medical specialists as required by law), constituting violations of several of the rights of the accused women, including their right to privacy, to health, to due legal process, to equality and to non-discrimination.

Litigation strategy: A *habeas corpus* petition was submitted in order to stop the prosecution of the accused women. This is a common legal strategy in the Latin American context.

Media strategy: The Jornadas network published articles and interviews in major magazines and newspapers across the country as a way to disseminate their message and mobilize public opinion against the prosecution.

Parliamentary strategy: Due to the pressure exerted by feminists and their lobbying with sympathetic legislators, a public hearing was held in the National Congress in which the authorities of Mato Grosso do Sul had to publicly explain their actions.

Looking Ahead

With respect to the legal strategy, it was extremely difficult to find a woman who had had an abortion at the clinic and who was willing to take legal action. Given all the publicity the case received at the national level, the women involved were not willing to give interviews or speak about the case in public. This presented difficulties for the legal strategy. Many of the women, embarrassed by what was happening, moved away from the city.

The case is still ongoing, and feminists continue fighting to have the criminal proceedings dropped. The movement continues to exert pressure, and the judge responsible for the case, who at the beginning spoke about prosecuting 1,500 women, has begun to say that the number of accused women would not exceed 900.

Although the movement has not had success with its legal strategy, this does not mean that, under strong social pressure, the local court cannot change its position. In addition, the movement has a strategy in reserve: it can bring the case to the Federal Supreme Court to question the constitutionality of the criminal process as a whole. This legal strategy has not yet been explored.

www.themis.org.br

Religious Fundamentalisms in Indigenous Contexts in Chiapas and the Violation of Women's Rights

Colectivo de Encuentro entre Mujeres (COLEM)

Guadalupe Elizalde Molina and Martha Guadalupe Figueroa Mier;
Edited by Luz Maceira Ochoa

Context

This case study summarizes two cases involving Tzeltal women in indigenous communities in Chiapas, southeastern Mexico. In both cases, the context and the ways religious fundamentalisms operate are similar.

María de Jesús's case, which occurred at the end of the 1990s, involves the expulsion of a woman from her community due to a false accusation of adultery which made her a "sinner" in the eyes of the religion, customs and practices in her community. She was stripped of her house and way of making a living and was on the brink of losing custody of her children.

Hilda's case, which occurred at the beginning of this century, involves the rape of a young disabled woman, who was then denied the right to terminate her pregnancy by medical professionals who invoked religious arguments. The young woman faced discrimination when she and her family attempted to seek justice; the municipal and community authorities refused to apprehend the rapist who went on to rape again.

Colectivo de Encuentro entre Mujeres (COLEM)

The Grupo de Mujeres de San Cristóbal de las Casas (now COLEM, Colectivo de Encuentro entre Mujeres de San Cristóbal de las Casas or Women's Collective of San Cristóbal de las Casas) was created in 1989 in response to the constant reports of sexual violence against women in the town. It is a non-profit feminist organization that has worked in Los Altos, Chiapas, Mexico, since 1990 for the rights of women and against sexual and domestic violence. COLEM provides support and popular education, and works to disseminate, communicate and research these topics.

Context

Chiapas is a state in the south-eastern part of Mexico on the border with Guatemala. It has the second largest indigenous population in the country, with nearly one million indigenous inhabitants. It is one of the states with the highest rates of poverty, social backwardness, maternal mortality and illiteracy. Its natural wealth has led to a struggle between the native populations—the owners of the land—and the state and federal governments, as well as national and foreign private investors, for control and exploitation of its resources. The indiscriminate exploitation of resources has created an ecological crisis, growing poverty and the exploitation of the labour of the local population.

In many indigenous communities in Chiapas, the federal and state political structure co-exists, in the form of institutions and officials, with the traditional system of customs and practices or governments. In addition, *caciques* (local indigenous leaders) establish a cliental relationship with the population, which they can control and mobilize; the *caciques* play the role of intermediaries between the people and the formal mechanisms of power of the State. Another important factor is the military occupation in place since the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and the presence of paramilitary groups—which have increased violence to extreme levels in the area—leading to the displacement of entire communities and creating a situation of profound social tension.

In Chiapas, women are the poorest of a poor population; they have the highest levels of illiteracy, and in many cases are formally excluded or under-represented in the traditional systems of government and positions of power. They are also exploited, victims of violence and discriminated against, both at home and in their communities.

Opposition

In the Altos region specifically, where the cases analyzed here occurred, three Christian denominations are represented: Evangelical, Catholicism (liberation theology) and orthodox Mexican Catholicism. There is a strong syncretism between these religions and pre-Hispanic indigenous customs and practices. The largest number of religious conflicts in Mexico occurred in this region between 1960 and 2001, as a result of the intolerance of orthodox leaders (from San Pascualito) and *caciques*, who attacked or expelled from their communities converts to Evangelicalism. Others have been expelled for belonging to political parties other than the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party). Those who were forced to leave organized and settled outside the old city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Leaders arose in the neighbourhoods and communities they established, who reproduced

the systems of power that they had fled. They became *caciques*. They accumulated power and even weapons. Their power is such that, in many cases, the municipal authorities are not able to limit their power or combat impunity or the crimes in these communities.

Although there have been significant changes in recent years contributing to an environment where indigenous peoples can claim their human rights, the position and condition of women has changed much more slowly and unequally. Ideas and practices that devalue and affect women continue to exist, as shown in the cases analyzed here.

Strategies

Legal actions: In María de Jesús's case, administrative-legal proceedings were filed with the town against the neighbourhood authorities and familial proceedings were brought against the father of the children for alimony. A complaint was also filed with the Comisión de Derechos Humanos de Chiapas (Human Rights Commission of Chiapas) and with the Procuraduría de Justicia (State Attorney's Office), local deputies and the Comisión de Equidad y Género (Equity and Gender Committee) of the Chamber of Deputies.

Hilda's case was brought to the state and federal human rights committees and was included in the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

Denunciation and publicization: In María de Jesús's case, reports in the local media (radio) were part of the pressure applied to the authorities and to raise awareness of the people involved. In addition, it was discussed in forums and there were public protests against the authorities. In Hilda's case, the radio was also used to publicize the case and the names of the involved authorities; activities were held in schools. A key part of the strategy was publicizing Hilda's case in conjunction with that of Paulina, a 13-year-old Mexican girl who was also raped and denied a legal abortion on religious grounds. Both cases involved young women who evoked empathy and solidarity due to their youth and innocence.

Organizing and group support: Both cases utilized the strategy of working with other organizations and women's networks to expose practices that are illegal and to analyze the cases using a gender perspective. In Hilda's case, they were also able to introduce to different networks and coalitions already existing issues related to the case, such as sexual and reproductive rights, youth, indigenous rights, the secular state, etc. The defence team was also able to become involved in relevant political activities, such as the visit of the rapporteur on indigenous people.

Discourse: In María de Jesús’s case, a human rights discourse was used to start conversations with the leaders of the *colonia* and traditional indigenous leaders. They spoke under the banner of knowing the law. This was important because one of the bases of this type of fundamentalisms is ignorance, which enables manipulation. In Hilda’s case, utilizing the discourse of a secular state was key to joining broader social demands. Advocacy for a secular state is urgent in Mexico because the right and other fundamentalist groups are gaining power and influence by occupying strategic political, economic, social and religious positions; although we just won the fight to legally define the state as “secular” in the Mexican Constitution (February 2010), attacks against secularism and actual non-secular practices continue.

Looking Ahead

We must advocate for women subjected to religious-political fundamentalisms so that these violations are punished and to weaken fundamentalist ideas and practices as well as the power of their leaders.

Advocacy in the case of María de Jesús and other indigenous women in the northern part of San Cristóbal de las Casas exposed and publicized the problem, as well as women’s ability to organize and take action. It also added to the visibility of COLEM, which gained recognition locally, nationally and even internationally as a resource in the struggle for women’s rights and as a feminist organization. This recognition also entails risk, in that the organization has been singled out by fundamentalist groups and/or some leaders as an organization that opposes them and their interests.

COLEM also gained a better understanding of how fundamentalist groups operate in their context and learned that in a context of religious conflicts, other social divisions polarize people. In addition, informal agreements or alliances between different religious groups or affiliations and political parties may be made to maintain the subordination of women. Subsequent analysis of the situation emphasized the need for a record of the events and for monitoring of the actions implemented. For strategic litigation, they need to create, document and present evidence that more clearly explains the extent of the injury. Another lesson learned is with regards to the importance of creating alliances with youth groups and organizations that work on the rights of children; they were not invited to take part in the advocacy and dissemination of this case and it would have been appropriate to do so.

María de Jesús’s and Hilda’s cases clearly demonstrated that feminists need to show, within and outside of indigenous communities, that so-called “customs and practices” are systems that have changed with the passage of time and that “external” religious, cultural and political elements have influenced them. One way to debunk certain myths, to rob them of their “attraction” for people, is through arguments and information that help people to recognize incongruities and their negative—and even inhuman—effects on the community.

In the cases analyzed here, the refusal of the authorities to comply with the law, which confirmed the injustice and power of community leaders or staff of public institutions, created an environment of impunity that robs strength from or even inhibits women’s efforts to claim their rights. María de Jesús and Celia (Hilda’s mother) chose to not pursue justice. This discouragement and lack of confidence are part of the environment in which we must work. Women need to be trained to know their rights and to be empowered in the broadest terms, as do people in law enforcement and the judiciary, in order for them to recognize that compliance with the laws that protect women is obligatory.

Lastly, Hilda’s case is pertinent to the current challenge of ensuring the consistent decriminalization of abortion across all of Mexico’s federal states, a process that has suffered significant set backs since 2008 as various local legislatures (at least 17 at the start of 2010) have criminalized abortion and similar laws are being debated in other states. Avoiding and reversing this trend is urgent. Coordinated action between people and organizations that advocate for human rights, unions and professional organizations, such as for lawyers, doctors or health professionals, among others, is necessary to do so.

Rural Feminist Activism and Religious Fundamentalism in Nova Scotia, Canada

Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

Lucille Harper, Leona M. English and Betsy MacDonald

Context

Antigonish is a small town in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia that serves an extensive rural area. The dominant religion is Roman Catholicism, with up to 80% of the people identifying as Catholic. Although the university, schools and hospital are now secular, they were originally established as Catholic institutions and the Church continues to hold considerable influence within the community. While much of that influence is socially progressive in its concerns about community health and well-being, there is an entrenched group of fervent religious fundamentalists who oppose women's social and economic autonomy and all things perceived to be feminist and, therefore, threatening to their traditional beliefs, customs and ways of living. In one rural school board district, there has been a concerted effort led by a small group of religious fundamentalists with support from fathers' rights activists to limit and to prevent students from accessing information about personal relationships, health and sexuality.

The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

Established in the 1980s, the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) is a local women's organization that provides support services and programs to women, adolescent girls and women's rights advocates, and provides educational programs to promote women's equality and social justice. Its support services and educational programs for youth are seen as key to addressing social inequities and different forms of discrimination and to advancing the status of women. As a feminist organization, however, it tends to be a lightning rod for anti-woman, anti-equality sentiments, and its work with youth has generated sustained opposition from religious fundamentalists and their allies.

Opposition

Between 2002 and 2008, members of the local school board actively

resisted the provision of resources and programs that were approved for students by the Nova Scotia Department of Education, including the Rural Youth Healthy Relationships Education Project (2002), *Sex? A Healthy Sexuality Resource* (first edition, 2004), Youth Health Centres (2006), and the Healthy Relationships for Youth Program (2007). Fundamentalist opposition to these initiatives asserted that they focused primarily on advancing the sexual autonomy of girls by giving them information about contraception and abortion, thereby encouraging "recreational" sex outside of marriage. The programs and resources were perceived as challenging the privileged position of the traditional family by allowing students autonomous access to sexual health services and education, and by promoting acceptance of same-sex relationships. To religious fundamentalists, these efforts represented a threat to the patriarchal order that centres on the control of female sexuality and the preservation of heteronormative relationships.

The opposition included members of Catholic civil rights groups and conservative Roman Catholic congregants who adhere to a strict interpretation of scripture, traditional doctrines and practices, collaborating with anti-feminist and fathers' rights groups that maintain that society is biased in favour of women and discriminates against males. These groups identify the traditional, nuclear family as the cornerstone of society, whereby fathers are the authority in the home and men are the leaders in the community. They support traditional male and female roles within the family and society, thereby keeping women subordinate to men, and they claim parents' rights to make decisions for their children, regardless of what educational leaders or youth themselves determine is in their best interests. Their ability to network across North America and across religious denominations contributes greatly to the strength of their campaigning. While the fundamentalist group in Antigonish is predominantly Catholic, it has relied on support from members of the American religious right, which is mainly Protestant.

Strategies

The decision of the Women's Centre to take action was precipitated by major opposition at the school board level to the youth-centred initiatives named above, each of which the Women's Centre viewed as crucial to the health and well-being of young women. The strategies they used were:

Analyzing discourses: AWRC built an analysis that unmasked fundamentalist ideologues, identified their agenda, and named them as a distinct, oppressive and regressive ideology within a dominant religion. This distinction allowed those practising the religion to separate themselves from the imposition of narrow interpretations and to challenge the fundamentalist message.

Building support for the programs: Through their website, media interviews, press releases, and public speaking engagements, AWRC provided accurate information about the programs to the general public, including documentation of their goals and the positive impacts from the perspective of students, teachers and program facilitators. In this way, it broadened the community support base for the initiatives, which proved essential in countering resistance from fundamentalist groups.

Engaging with allies: AWRC worked with healthcare providers, organized a letter-writing campaign, collected signatures for a petition, provided testimony to the need for the centres at a public school board meeting, and engaged the media, thereby rallying considerable public support for students to access Youth Health Centres autonomously.

Building positive working relationships: AWRC prioritized building positive working relationships with parents, academics, healthcare providers, and local women's religious orders and was able to call upon support from organizations and individuals across the province. Over the years, it had also built good relationships with local media and was thus able to use the media to inform the public about its programs and counter the misinformation being disseminated by fundamentalist groups. As the local and provincial media reported on the struggle, support continued to grow.

Looking Ahead

Progressive feminist organizations from all parts of the world that are concerned with social justice and equality would benefit from identifying the many texts and arguments that fundamentalists use and the campaigns in which they are involved (either explicitly or under other mantles), undertaking policy and discourse analyses of these texts and campaigns, and sharing their findings. Using discourse analysis to build multiple strategies and action plans that both expose and challenge the fundamentalist message is critical to advancing positive social change for women and girls at the local level, as well as for connecting with the work of women's rights activists around the world. Although fundamentalisms are pervasive, exposing them—while at the same time cultivating new alliances and broadening community support—is vital to progressing a woman-positive vision.

www.antigonishwomenscentre.com

Sexuality, Gender and the Religious Right: Youth Advocacy on LGBT Rights in the United States

Soulforce Q (young adult division of Soulforce)

Haven Herrin

Context

In the United States, about 76% of the population identifies as Christian, and a significant proportion of Christians identify as conservative or evangelical. We see fundamentalism occurring where Christianity meets institutional power. Known broadly as the Religious Right, these movements seek to espouse a standard morality for personal and political behaviours. Throughout his tenure, President George W. Bush (2001-2009) worked in concert with Religious Right leaders and catered to their power base of white, evangelical Protestants.

There is no single platform defining the Religious Right, but this group generally works to curtail abortion and birth control, stem cell research, sex education, social welfare systems, protections for sexual and gender diversity, and same-sex marriage. A common thread in their agendas is the direct or indirect support of patriarchy. Opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment for women is a consistent issue on fundamentalist platforms, as is opposition to the social and political equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. While the Religious Right gives various reasons to justify oppression of LGBT people, most often cited is the belief that the Bible condemns sexual and gender diversity.

Soulforce and Soulforce Q Focus on the Religious Right

Soulforce Q is the youth division of Soulforce, a national civil rights and social justice organization committed to teaching and applying principles of non-violence to end discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Soulforce's vision is freedom from religious and political oppression for LGBT people through the practice of relentless non-violent resistance. In 2006, Soulforce organized the first Equality Ride, a two-month cross-country bus trip to 19 colleges that actively discriminate against openly LGBT students. Soulforce Q

now serves as the sponsor of the Equality Ride. Youth engagement is seen as critical to direct activism to change hearts and minds through personalizing efforts for equality.

Equality Ride Methods and Intentions

Engagement: Soulforce Q engages with universities because they play a powerful role as centres of research, employment, social codification and sanction of thought, and the schools visited on the Equality Ride are integrated into larger denominational structures. Schools selected are a mix of those that agree to collaborate and those that do not want the Riders on campus. In calling upon schools to collaborate, Soulforce Q relies on the expectation that campuses be forums for social engagement and debate.

Media outreach: Soulforce Q reaches out to local and national media weeks in advance of a campus visit. Media (including major outlets such as MTV, Newsweek, BBC and PBS) often respond with interest to the Equality Ride project because the interactions are unpredictable.

Recruitment: Every year, Equality Ride recruitment takes place through media outreach, by word of mouth, using online social networking sites, partnering with on- and off-campus activist groups, and through Soulforce's mailing lists. The application process involves a written essay and phone interviews to gauge intention and personality and to assess how applicants respond to a set of biblically inclined questions like those often encountered on campus.

Training: Participant training includes: readings, facilitated discussions, presentations by experts on anti-racism and transgender issues, learning how to speak to the media, planning and recruitment for events and rallies, learning the use of non-violent communication skills, and examining internalized sexism, racism and classism. As critical analysis of scriptures is needed to open a space for counter-organizing, Riders also learn how to neutralize the biblical texts traditionally used to condemn LGBT people. They couple this information with facts on the biological and political realities of LGBT people.

Campus visits: An Equality Ride visit is more than a campus event, involving churches and synagogues, and citizen activists. Most of these campuses are physically and emotionally unsafe for LGBT students and their allies. Many have discriminatory practices in place that force LGBT students to hide their identities or risk expulsion. Community potluck dinners feed the Riders most nights, and local activist groups invite them to share stories, discuss scripture, and learn about local LGBT

activism. Although Riders present to classrooms and auditoriums on topics such as liberation theology or civil rights or gender issues, the most vital aspect of the project is the one-on-one conversation: Equality Riders sitting, studying, speaking and eating with students. Condemning homosexuality in the abstract is far easier than condemning a lesbian Equality Rider who embodies and explains how her sexuality is an integral, healthy part of her life.

Civil disobedience: Soulforce Q continually debates when and how to challenge schools that refuse to engage with the Equality Ride. As a matter of principle, Soulforce Q cannot accept "no" as an answer to the request for dialogue. Some Riders feel it appropriate to trespass when necessary; if they do not challenge a school's rejection, then nothing changes. Being willing to risk civil disobedience creates the space for dialogue that would not occur otherwise, as schools are pushed to find ways of collaborating, realizing that the alternative is a publicized arrest.

Looking Ahead

Equality Riders have been subject to harassment and threats and have had their buses vandalized. In addition to external threats, there is often internal strife among Riders about consensus-based versus hierarchic decision-making. Sexism, racism, ageism and other forms of social privilege are also present within the community of 25 Riders. Discussing oppression within the group is thus a difficult but necessary task. Despite these challenges, a number of factors enable Soulforce Q to pursue its mission. With regard to the struggle to secure funding, the culture of philanthropy, the existence of well-endowed foundations, and the routine giving of small donations are critical factors in the project's feasibility. There is also a critical mass of young people in the United States who are "out" with their LGBT identities, and some Christian and Jewish denominations support LGBT people in doctrine and policy. Other civil society groups also offer necessary supports through donations, assisting in community outreach, or participating in acts of civil disobedience. Due to the long history of justice-seeking dissidence in the United States, the project also moves forward within a culture that allows for dissent and civil disobedience.

www.soulforce.org

Christian Fundamentalisms and Women's Rights in the African Context: Mapping the Terrain

Jessica Horn

Context

This case study explores the dynamics of Christian fundamentalism in sub-Saharan Africa and the impacts of fundamentalist doctrine, advocacy and mobilization on women's rights in the region. It focuses on fundamentalisms in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, as well as fundamentalist actors in mainline Protestant churches. In the African context, religious discourses and institutions have been used opportunistically by politicians and extreme conservatives in civil society as a means of pushing their political, ideological and economic agendas on a range of issues from staying in power, to becoming wealthy, to maintaining legal and social gender inequality. The new wave of African Pentecostalism and its charismatic derivatives in particular have proved a useful tool to this end because of four key characteristics: a mass popular base (crucial for mobilizing political pressure and votes); a theology that focuses on and celebrates prosperity and accumulation of capital (and can thus facilitate both wealth accumulation and lucrative corruption); a lack of regulation given the absence of a centralized religious authority and weak non-profit oversight mechanisms; and the lack of a hermeneutic tradition and/or critical debate about scripture, the latter two characteristics enabling the doctrine to spread largely unquestioned. The fact that the constituencies of these churches are predominantly economically disenfranchised women and men with limited access to information or social and political capital means that they can also be drawn to the church through promises of material conditions.

Christian Fundamentalist Strategies for Mobilizing and Advocacy

While Christian fundamentalism has played out in a variety of ways across Africa, fundamentalist groups apply common strategies:

Comprehensive communications structure: This includes TV channels, radio stations, newspapers, websites and blogs, as well as popular culture such as gospel music. At a local level, this also includes leaflets, billboards and rallies to draw people to attend revivals. Church members are themselves a resource in disseminating messages.

Entry into formal party politics: In some countries, this strategy gives fundamentalists greater leverage over policy and decision-making on matters affecting women's rights and autonomy.

Mobilizing women against women's rights: Fundamentalists mobilize women to lead rallies against the introduction of protective laws or to speak out against other women and women's rights activists. Withholding or giving partial, biased information is central to this strategy.

Strategic appeals to cultural and national identity: Fundamentalists appeal to cultural and national identity to validate their ideas and agendas.

Strategies for Resisting Christian Fundamentalism

There are a number of possible entry points to begin tackling the social and political phenomenon of Christian fundamentalisms in the African context:

Naming the phenomenon: The usefulness of the term "religious fundamentalisms" as an organizing strategy is contested. Some activists feel that being able to name the phenomenon is a critical step in addressing it. Others feel that the term is potentially divisive and not helpful in encouraging members of Christian churches to reflect critically on their beliefs.

Mobilizing women: Where fundamentalists have been able to rally women against women's rights by selectively interpreting scientific and policy information, a feminist response might be to provide these women with comprehensive, accurate information and space for dialogue. For instance, the Ugandan Feminist Forum, has incorporated discussions on aligning Christian beliefs with feminist principles and on learning from the progressive tradition in Christianity, as part of encouraging Christian members to engage their prejudices.

Progressive interpretations of scripture: Challenging fundamentalisms from within religious discourses is another strategy, using progressive interpretations of scripture and supporting charismatic clergy who hold progressive views about women's rights and gender equality.

Reaching out to young people: Constituency-building requires reaching out to youth, in particular young women, in ways that resonate with and support their own concerns and development and build their understanding and leadership.

Coordinating efforts: Because Christian fundamentalist actors are networked regionally, with prominent allies in the United States, it is necessary to consider forming a similar network to coordinate efforts

and support activists across the region to combat these actors. African-based and foreign human rights and development donors have a role to play in ensuring such efforts are resourced and sustained, and stepping up funding for anti-fundamentalist initiatives led by progressive Africans.

Dissent from within: The attraction of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity for their followers and for political actors is largely opportunistic. Churches provide a vehicle to achieve a more basic material or political aim, but they are just as prone to losing membership and political appeal if they fail to fulfil the purpose for which they are being used. While it is difficult to rely on dissent from within as a counter-fundamentalist strategy, it might be useful to track individuals and groups who express dissenting opinions within church institutions and target them with progressive information and support.

Targeting the gender equality sector: The presence of fundamentalist actors within the broader gender equality sector isolates the handful of uncompromisingly progressive feminist activists and weakens progressive responses and advocacy on sexual and reproductive rights and family laws. The African Feminist Forum, and its derivative national feminist forums are providing new spaces to tackle this issue head-on.

Looking Ahead

The draw of participation in churches espousing fundamentalist doctrines can be linked to a sense of desperation and need for the reaffirmation of community and hope, alongside practical material support in the face of personal loss and social and economic crises. However, there are also many actors who are using the religious platform opportunistically as a means to advance their economic and political agendas, including an agenda of maintaining patriarchal power.

The general lack of accessible critical analysis, research, dialogue and comprehensive advocacy on Christian fundamentalisms and women's rights in sub-Saharan Africa has meant that there is still neither a united nor a very vocal counter-discourse about religious fundamentalisms in the region—and indeed to an extent these fundamentalist doctrines are uncritically embraced by some within organizations working on women's rights themselves.

In the African context, countering the mass-based popular constituency-building of Christian fundamentalists with the smaller-scale, largely urban-based organizing of feminists and women's rights activists is a key challenge. To be effective, the collective response will need to be rooted in, and appeal to, a similarly popular base, while also targeting Africa's decision-makers. If not, individual activists will continue to take on the task alone, and to shoulder the backlash as well.

Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms in Bolivia: The Inclusion of Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the Constitution

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-Bolivia

Teresa Lanza Monje

Context

In Latin America, the Catholic church was an instrument of colonization used to conquer the indigenous population and install a new political, ideological and economic system in the region. The Catholic church almost exterminated all forms of indigenous religion and also enriched itself by exploiting indigenous peoples and the resources in the Americas. Most countries in the region recognize the strong ties between the state and the Catholic church in their constitutions.

In Bolivia, the Catholic church is recognized by the state. It also influences the agenda of social movements, which view sexual and reproductive rights (SRR) through the lens of “sin.” At the end of 2005, Evo Morales was elected president, resulting in drastic changes to the social and political framework in the country. An indigenous president as head of government broke the oligarchic power that had existed for centuries in the halls of power and made change possible, although it will be many years before the impacts are fully experienced. This new political and social landscape has led to the comment that Bolivia is experiencing a “different social time,” which does not mean that fundamentalisms or exclusionary practices aimed at women have disappeared in their entirety; just the opposite, they have in fact been exacerbated. For example, the Catholic church continues to strongly exercise political power in Bolivia, in addition to its role as a religion recognized by the state, which allows it to influence educational and health policies in urban and rural areas.

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-Bolivia

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-Bolivia (CDD-Bolivia) is a civil society, non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in Bolivia in 1996 in response to the needs of the women's movements and the

need to harmonize those movements with policies emanating from the international conferences on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and on Women (Beijing, 1995). The organization works in the areas of advocacy, training, communications and ensuring SRR.

Opposition

In Bolivia, the most important fundamentalist actor is the Catholic church, which is allied with oligarchic and conservative groups that have held economic, political and cultural power throughout the history of the country. As an expression of this alliance, and to advocate for its own interests, it launched a campaign to discredit the president and his policies from pulpits during mass and other gatherings, which led to confrontations between different sectors of society who felt affected by this manipulation of religion.

It is also important to note the fundamentalist tendencies of some aspects of indigenous movements, which defend the continuance of some usages and customs that in effect violate women's rights. Recently, other Christian (Evangelical) churches have had a growing presence. As in other countries in the region, they have allied with the Catholic church to oppose women's SRR and to try to block the current process of ethnic and social equity to advance and fully integrate women and sexual diversity in Bolivia.

Strategies

One of CDD-Bolivia's goals was to ensure that the new constitution include protection for SRR, the separation of church and state, and the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. It also worked to block the inclusion of items proposed by the Catholic church and its allies, such as protection for life "from conception." CDD-Bolivia achieved all of its goals.

Its main strategy was to coordinate human rights advocates; feminists; and social justice movements for youth, indigenous people, rural people, domestic workers, and sexual diversity, among others, which led to the articulation of a common agenda. Its work with indigenous women was particularly important since they experience the most severe violations of SRR while also facing hostility from their compatriots in indigenous rights movements on these issues. The process also included advocacy and lobbying activities in the Constituent Assembly, educating activists to increase their own understandings of the issues they advocated on, disseminating its proposal to society in general (including debates during which individual experiences were shared that activists then

used to support their lobbying), monitoring the actions of the Catholic church, crafting arguments to counteract religious fundamentalist positions, creating alliances with representatives of religions other than Catholicism, as well as an internal process to overcome the desire for individual leadership and work to prioritize the collective interest.

Looking Ahead

SRR, the separation of church and state, and the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity were incorporated into the Bolivian Constitution, which was approved on January 25th, 2009 (Articles 66, 4 and 14, respectively). Future challenges include continuing to work with other social movements to overcome the ever-present influence of Catholicism, which sees SRR as "sins" and not rights.

This initiative has demonstrated that working collectively and in alliance against a powerful and implacable enemy is essential. This collective action has been valuable because it has allowed us to build common languages and partnerships between movements to challenge fundamentalisms, which has helped to build favourable public opinion and a solid social base in support for the subjects of a secular state, women's rights and SRR. This work, which CDD-Bolivia will continue in the years to come, requires flexibility and a focus that is not dogmatically tied to individual convictions, as well as openness to the shared ownership of initiatives.

www.catolicasporelderechoadecidir.org

Arab Queer Women and Transgenders Confronting Diverse Religious Fundamentalisms: The Case of Meem in Lebanon

Meem
Nadine M.

Queer women and transgenders in Lebanon face multiple layers of discrimination: sexism, classism, homophobia, racism and sectarianism. Lebanon criminalizes homosexuality under Article 534 of the Penal Code, a French colonial law that condemns “sexual acts against nature.” Although the law is not frequently applied to imprison people, it gives the Internal Security Forces the ability to harass people based on what they perceive to be homosexual behaviours or characteristics.

The biggest challenge to any form of social justice in Lebanon is the sectarian makeup of its society, which provides a breeding ground for divisions and intolerance. Any effort to reform laws and practices towards the expansion of queer rights must negotiate independently with each of the 18 different religious communities. While the Penal Code is uniform, any major political development in Lebanon requires the support of all the various sects. In this context, religious fundamentalisms affect the LGBTQI movement in two ways: in posing a direct threat to non-heterosexual people and in promoting deep-rooted sectarianism that can be used to divide the queer community.

Meem

Founded in 2007, Meem is a support community for lesbian, bisexual, queer and questioning women and transgendered people in Lebanon. The group runs a safe house where activists meet daily to organize, write, research, discuss, and empower one another. Navigating progressive feminist and anarchist politics, Meem’s mission is to improve the quality of living for Lebanon’s sexual and gender minorities. It confronts the oppression of fundamentalisms in two ways: as a group fighting for social justice in Lebanon as a whole, and as individual queer members of their own particular sects working alongside their allies of different sects.

Strategies

Meem employs different strategies to challenge religious fundamentalist oppression of alternative sexualities and gender identities in Lebanon. Its goal is grassroots change, from the bottom up.

Building communities: As fundamentalists attack homosexuality by saying that it is an anomaly and an exception to the norm, Meem works to counter this idea by mobilizing a strong community of LGBTQ people. The group’s main strategy for grassroots change is word-of-mouth, which is how it grew to 300 members in its first two years. Meem works to build a sense of community based on the values of trust, love, solidarity and loyalty. It connects to diverse religious communities in Lebanon through its members, allowing them to be the change in their own environments.

Meem has a counselling service available to all members, and also holds closed support groups. It has debate sessions, bring-a-friend days, and has sent all active members to international conferences and workshops to gain experience, network, inform and learn. Meem also holds weekly trainings to arm its members with arguments, education and a sense of confidence. All activities focus on community- and activist-building to strengthen the base of the movement’s greatest assets: the people.

Building alliances: Alliances are important for queer movements in particular because they show that non-queers are advocating for the rights of LGBTQIs (and *vice versa*). Meem works on finding sheikhs, priests and other public religious figures tolerant of homosexuality, and it builds alliances with local women’s and human rights movements, as well as leftist political parties and progressive thinkers. It networks with these groups not only to gain their support, but also to lend strength to their programs, as these struggles are intertwined. Queer women are women first; many are working class women, women from different ethno-religious communities, from different nationalities living in Lebanon. So Meem works on women’s rights, socio-economic inequalities and anti-racism advocacy, just as they work for the rights of queer people.

Reclaiming our own voices: Meem works to reclaim and mainstream discussions of sex and sexuality in the Arab world, discussions that have been censored or rendered invisible by fundamentalist forces. In the search for gay-friendly Islamic interpretations, Meem has aligned itself with experts in the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR) who have been instrumental in analyzing issues around (homo)sexuality and religion in Muslim societies. Meem seeks to remain sensitive to community values, stressing a local and indigenous identity, and insists on an Arab movement, on Arab solidarity, which has led to the formation of a regional Arab LGBTQI network.

Media and online activism: While every religious institution in Lebanon has its own media—television and radio stations, newspapers, magazines, websites and campaigns—Meem has opted not to use mass media until they are well prepared for it. Instead, the group creates its own media: members write their own poetry and stories and essays, document their own histories, investigate their own reports and produce their own films. They have also recently published a book called *Bareed Mista3jil (Express Mail)* with 41 anonymous, first-person accounts of the lives and experiences of LGBTQs in Lebanon.

Meem has built up a powerful online activism strategy that allows it to maintain its members' anonymity and safeguard the group from sensationalized mass media attention. This includes the Meem blog, *Bekhsoos* online magazine that publishes ten to 15 articles in English, Arabic, and French weekly, a Meem YouTube channel that hosts video clips challenging gender binaries and the criminalization of LGBTQs, a Meem Twitter account, a Facebook page, and various websites for different campaigns (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliance). This strong online presence has given the group a vehicle for public and underground organizing, and allows it to stay connected to members and other queer people and allies across Lebanon and the world.

Looking Ahead

In planning for the future, Meem members have met very discreetly with lesbians in several Arab cities. If these women are not active already, the group helps to empower them so that when they are ready to speak up, they will be strong enough. As opposed to “exporting” its expertise, Meem makes it available to adapt or customize, connecting with LGBTQs in the Arab world to share, learn and collaborate. Just as religious fundamentalisms are a regional force across different Arab cities, in Meem’s vision, the LGBTQ movement must also be an Arab movement, emerging from the different communities within the Arab world.

www.meemgroup.org

An Overview of Fundamentalist Groups in Peru

Observatorio de los Grupos Anti-derechos,
Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos
Sexuales y Reproductivos (PROMSEX)

Jaris Mujica and Mauricio Cerna

Context

In Peru, religious fundamentalism based on Catholicism cannot be understood as an attitude of opposition to or as a direct break from the formal democratic system of the State; rather it must be viewed as a collection of practices and discourses that reinterpret and accommodate democracy and human rights discourses in the light of biblical principles and papal mandates. Peruvian fundamentalists in general are from the “Catholic right” and are linked to economically powerful groups whose work is guided by global policies. They are “naturalists” in the sense that they defend what the Catholic Church calls “natural law,” which is the union of heterosexual men and women in matrimony to procreate and thereby reveal “the mystery of God’s love.” From this perspective, a diversity of sexual options or ties and family structures is seen as “unnatural.” In addition, fundamentalist leaders are socially and economically powerful with access to levels of government where decisions are made and from where they can block or eliminate policies that support sexual and reproductive rights. It is important to note that the structure of the Peruvian State is designed to allow the Catholic Church to participate in the political sphere.

PROMSEX

PROMSEX is a non-governmental organization that advocates for sexual and reproductive rights and works towards a society free of all types of discrimination and violence, where women and men exercise full citizenship and their rights are guaranteed. PROMSEX seeks to contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination that prevent the full exercise of human rights guaranteeing free and informed reproduction as well as pleasurable sexuality free from risks, through gender equality, women’s empowerment, the construction of non-sexist masculinities, expansion of the exercise of citizenship and the elimination of gender-based violence.

Opposition

In Peru, Catholic fundamentalist groups have managed to develop an efficient social division of labour without losing the ability to collaborate among themselves and organize toward objectives that are global in scope. These groups, described below in greater detail, are lay organizations. Such organizations create a blurred line between “secular” and “religious” because their mandate is explicitly religious but their membership is open to clergy as well as Catholics who are not part of the clergy (i.e., laypeople).

The Opus Dei prelatore has focused on dominating the bureaucratic structure of the Peruvian church and on pressuring the State via members that hold high positions within the government. The Sodalicio de la Vida Cristiana (Society of Apostolic Life) is dedicated to catechizing the faithful (it has more than 40,000 members). It also has a news website and owns the Catholic University of San Pablo (the case study by the Foro Regional de Arequipa has more information about the activities of this group). The work of the Centro de Promoción Familiar y Regulación Natural de la Natalidad (CEPROFARENA, Centre for Promotion of the Family and Natural Regulation of Fertility) consists of bringing a dogmatic religious discourse into medical practices, while the Population Research Institute (PRI) focuses on lobbying the legislature and on campaigns to discredit sexual and reproductive rights activists. The Alianza Latinoamericana para la Familia (ALAFa, Latin American Alliance for the Family) creates and disseminates educational curricula and influences the work of the Ministry of Education.

PROMSEX's Principal Strategies

- a) Investigate in order to deconstruct the discourses of these fundamentalist groups and identify their objectives and main leaders, and analyze their social networks, organizational structures and activities. This work includes monitoring these groups' publications and activities, as well as participating in their spaces.
- b) Disseminate information resulting from this research in print and electronic publications (newsletters and book-format reports) to strengthen advocacy for democratic principles and human rights, on which sexual and reproductive health is based. In some cases, this information is useful in alerting local organizations about the intentions of fundamentalist groups.
- c) Monitor the activities of fundamentalist groups through the Observatory of Anti-Rights Groups, which initially was limited to events in Peru, but given that fundamentalist groups are guided by international

policies, it now includes analyses of events in Ecuador, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Looking Ahead

As a result of its research, PROMSEX has come to the conclusion that fundamentalist groups may have succeeded in linking some aspects of their positions with democratic and human rights schemas in some sectors of civil society. However, we believe it is important to note that this link corresponds only to a discursive strategy and does not imply recognition of the humanity of others: it is an instrumental use of the rights discourse.

Despite advances in research on religious fundamentalist groups, PROMSEX believes that further exploration is needed into how the conservative wings of Catholicism have appropriated bioethics to construct medical and legal arguments against abortion, euthanasia, and assisted reproduction and the use of contraceptives, and to create a relationship between bioethics and natural law. The religious fundamentalist presence in the bioethics committees of public hospitals has often had lethal consequences for women. Therefore, it is essential that the sexual and reproductive rights agenda include dynamic strategies that focus on forums where questions of bioethics are resolved and that they do so with an understanding of the fundamentalist arguments. To do so, we must continue to observe, describe and understand religious fundamentalisms.

www.promsex.org

Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms in Mexico: The Separation of Church and State and Reaffirmation of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-México

Elizabeth Plácido

Context

Mexico is an exception in Latin America, being a predominately Catholic country, but with a long tradition of secularism which is recognized in its Constitution. At the beginning of the 21st century, the ascension to power of the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN, National Action Party), which has an organic relationship with the Catholic church and with right-wing groups, intensified the Catholic church's influence on Mexican public life. The church sought to expand its ecclesiastic privileges and limit the rights of women and of everyone who is not heterosexual. The constitutional reform process initiated in April 2007 set the stage for a confrontation between Catholic fundamentalisms and progressive sectors of civil society and various political parties over the definition of the relationship between church and State.

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-México

Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir-México (CDD-Mexico, Catholics for the Right to Decide) is a civil society association founded in 1994 that advocates for the recognition of the dignity of all people and reaffirms the moral authority of women and youth, as well as the rights of all people to make decisions about their sexuality and reproduction based on the exercise of their freedom of conscience. In addition, it advocates for the separation of church and state as the basis of democracy and one of the elements essential to the protection and guarantee of sexual and reproductive rights (SRR).

Opposition

In Mexico, the main fundamentalist actors include the leadership of the Catholic church; right-wing and extreme right-wing civil society

organizations, which identify with Catholic fundamentalist ideology and have ties to their international counterparts; PAN politicians with ties to the Catholic church, many of whom have been educated in religious schools; and businesspeople who use their economic power to impose their fundamentalist vision, especially on the media.

Catholic fundamentalists in Mexico have immense economic resources that allow them to manipulate awareness through the media and to appeal to the vulnerabilities created by poverty, fear and blame. In the past decade, they have sought to renew and reinforce their political power by influencing the creation of laws and public policies. They have gained control of the media and of key positions in the three branches of government, which enables them to spread their moral doctrine, thereby affecting the effective exercise of human rights and the liberties of individuals and of specific sectors of the population, including women and people of different sexual orientation (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, transgenders and transsexuals, or LGBTTTT people). Their demands include religious education in public schools, political rights for priests and censorship of the media when the content, in their opinion, "violates moral values."

The influence of Catholic fundamentalism is visible in the actions of state officials (for example, the diversion of public funds to support fundamentalist organizations, or reticence in responding to the complaints of victims of paedophile priests) and also by the quantity of civil society organizations with international ties and funding that actively advocate for fundamentalist agendas and organize large-scale events, such as the World Encounter of Families meetings (2004 and 2009).

Strategies

The first step in CDD-Mexico's strategy was to create an Agenda Pública de Derechos Humanos (Public Agenda for Human Rights, together with other civil society organizations, for the 2006 presidential campaign. The agenda included a section on gender parity and the rights of women. It also included the concept of the secular state as the foundation for the guarantee of equality of rights for women and freedom of beliefs.

The contested results of these elections demonstrated the need for a process to re-establish Mexican institutions that arose out of the constitutional reform. In this process, CDD-Mexico and its allies from civil society, academia and the political sphere worked to halt the initiatives of the Catholic right to advance its agenda. CDD-Mexico also met to create its own proposals for reform and pointed to a secular state as essential to the exercise of the freedom of opinion, thought and expression; the

right to choose; and as a guarantee of non-discrimination. The alliance between activists, academics, religious progressives, and legislators became a working group. The group worked collectively to create a strong foundation for a bill to consolidate the secular state in the new Mexican Constitution.

Another strategy was to lobby representatives of all the parties in the Congress, and as a result the group obtained their solid support for the initiative. Representatives from parties (such as the Partido Alternativa Socialdemócrata y Campesina/Social Democratic and Peasant Alternative Party) played a key role, as their agendas coincided with that of the coalition led by CDD-Mexico. These parties had their own reform bill which they agreed to not only discuss but also revise to incorporate civil society's suggestions. During the second stage of the strategy, these legislators worked with activists to obtain the support of representatives from all legislative blocs for the initiative and its approval by the Chamber of Deputies in 2008.

Looking Ahead

Congressional elections at the end of 2009 pose a challenge in that new alliances will need to be forged so that the bill on the secular state is passed in the legislature. The creation of an ecumenical alliance which brings together many religions and sectors of civil society, including those who advocate for the right to profess no religion, is an important factor that will enable CDD-Mexico to continue its work and to inform society in general about its ideas. Society's support will be essential to make this process sustainable and successful. It is important to note that this strategy aims to strengthen and sustain a secular state, which is a key element in obtaining women's rights. The authors believe a secular state is the basis of respect for freedom of conscience and of the recognition of the diversity of thought that create a society. Therefore, this cause has the potential to attract other sectors of society in addition to the women's and sexual diversity movements. CDD-Mexico has been successful in this area and means to continue to strengthen this focus that is essential to the success of the initiative.

www.catolicasmexico.org

The Death of Ana María Acevedo: Rallying Cry for the Women's Movement

Multisectorial de Mujeres de Santa Fe, Argentina (member of the Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito)

Lucila Puyol and Paula Condrac, with Mirtha Manzur

Context

In Argentina, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state is established in the Constitution. The church is granted privileges such as state subsidies for Catholic schools and exemption from taxes. The church interfered in every discussion of laws on divorce and joint custody, and it continues to interfere in public debate about sex education, civil unions for same sex couples and abortion, even when it is legal. In addition to the official church leadership, Opus Dei is very influential in Argentina. This Catholic organization has its own private universities, holds strategic professorships in public universities and exerts influence over the media, businesspeople and important state officials. On the other hand, shantytown priests (*curas villeros* in Spanish) and other similar movements express a different perspective on Catholicism. These movements link religious practices with social justice activism and the redistribution of wealth. And networks such as Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholics for the Right to Decide; affiliated with the North American Catholics for Choice) promote women's rights based on Catholic theology, feminism and citizenship.

The Multisectorial de Mujeres de Santa Fe

(Multisectorial Women's Group of Santa Fe, hereinafter "Multisectorial") is a feminist collective composed of individual women, women's organizations, civil society organizations and political parties. The group provides support to the struggles of popular movements but specifically focuses on advocating for women's human rights in Santa Fe Province, Argentina. It is a member of the Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito (National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion), a coalition of nearly 250 organizations and groups throughout the country.

In April 2007, members of the Multisectorial were involved in the fight to legalize abortion when Ana María Acevedo's case became public. Ana María was a young woman of limited socio-economic means, who was denied cancer treatment when she was discovered to be pregnant by the doctors of the Iturraspe de Santa Fe public hospital. The cancer treatment might have given Ana María a chance to survive, and would have complied with her desire to access treatment, but the doctors did not want to harm her pregnancy. The young woman's mother and father unsuccessfully requested that they perform an abortion, which is legal in Argentina to save the life of the "mother," as established in the Penal Code.

Strategies

The Multisectorial implemented many strategies to expose what had been done to Ana María and bring the doctors to justice:

Legal Strategies: As the legal representative of Ana María's parents, the Multisectorial filed a lawsuit against the medical personnel and the Bioethics Committee of Iturraspe Hospital (the latter have been prosecuted) and also brought a civil suit against Santa Fe Province and provincial health officials. It also plans to file a legal action internationally (at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights or the United Nations).

Public Actions: From the beginning, the Multisectorial worked with other civil society organizations to determine a strategy to appropriate public space through different actions (for example, protests in front of the hospital and the provincial Ministry of Health, marches for justice for Ana María in the city where she was born, etc.) in order to draw attention to the case. To increase the political impact, they also used playful and creative elements, including a call to local artists to paint a mural in memory of the young woman (and its restoration after it was damaged by Catholic activist groups). Four memorial murals have been painted, and two were restored after being damaged. On the first anniversary of Ana María's death, the Multisectorial organized a march and a symposium for discussion and exchange with feminists from all over Argentina. The Multisectorial also produced and disseminated widely a video with images from Ana María's life and death, as well images of the unflagging fight waged by her family and the Multisectorial in pursuit of justice www.youtube.com/watch?v=_H3IKxuS2wg.

Alliances: From the start, the Multisectorial sought support from diverse sources, including public bodies working against discrimination, universities, feminist organizations, provincial deputies, city councillors from Santa Fe, journalists, and independent medical professionals. The

Multisectorial also attended the Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres (National Women's Meeting, a gathering of more than 20,000 women from across the country) with Ana María's mother, who spoke about what had happened to her daughter. This was crucial in guaranteeing the women's movement's support for their strategies. To involve professionals, the Multisectorial organized debates on legal abortion and humane post-abortion care at the schools of law and medicine of the Universidad Nacional del Litoral.

Opposition

Fundamentalist opposition was mainly in the form of Catholic activist groups. These groups attended all the activities organized by the Multisectorial and worked to impede or prevent the debates. They also distributed pamphlets and other materials against women's right to make decisions about their bodies. They also damaged a mural created by activists in memory of Ana María and painted threats on the office door of one of the lawyers in charge of the case.

The Catholic Church was represented at activities by the local bishop, who publicly met with the first lawyer who worked with family. As a result, the family asked the Multisectorial's team of lawyers to represent them.

Although some individual medical professionals agreed with the Multisectorial's position, the medical establishment closed ranks in defence of those staff from Iturraspe Hospital who were charged in the case. These medical professionals prioritized their religious beliefs over their obligation to save their patient's life.

Looking Ahead

The Multisectorial believes that the strategy of fighting on two fronts, legally and politically, is an effective tool that must be used in conjunction with other civil society organizations. The debate about abortion has started in Argentina and there is no going back. It will be a hard fight, but many sectors of society now have more awareness regarding the issues, including a good number of provincial officials and legislators. In point of fact, in June 2009, the Ley Provincial de Adhesión a la Guía Nacional de Atención de Abortos No Punibles (Provincial Act on Adherence to the National Legal Abortion Care Guide) was approved.

If domestic remedies are exhausted, the Multisectorial will bring the case to international tribunals.

Religious and Political Fundamentalisms as a Threat to Women’s Rights: Challenges in the Legislature in Brazil

Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria - CFEMEA
Kauara Rodrigues, Juliano Alessander, Natalia Mori
and Soraya Fleischer

Context

In Latin America, religious and political fundamentalisms have historically been associated with the political right. However, in recent years even leftist governments and parties, in order to protect their interests and political alliances, have bargained with the rights won by women—particularly the right to legal abortion—and have recognized many privileges for churches. In Brazil specifically, abortion is only legal to save the life of the pregnant woman and in cases of rape. To date, fundamentalist influence has blocked approval of bill PL 1135/1991, which would decriminalize abortion during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Other issues of concern include the Conference of Bishop’s National Campaign “In Defence of Life,” and locally, the ban on emergency contraception in Jundiá, São Paulo, and the prosecution of the owner of a family planning clinic and approximately 10,000 women who had abortions at the clinic in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul. (This issue is analyzed in the case study by Themis.) This case study focuses specifically on the legislative experience of bill 1135/1991.

El Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria – CFEMEA

CFEMEA (Centre for Feminist Studies and Advisory Services) is a non-governmental organization that was founded in July 1989 by a group of feminists in Brasília, the capital of Brazil. It works to advance women’s rights as citizens and gender equality. It fights for a just and democratic society and state in an autonomous and non-partisan way. Founded on feminist principles, CFEMEA actively participates in the national women’s movement, and integrates with international feminist networks, especially in Latin America. It also participates in different initiatives against racism.

Opposition

In Brazil, the main religious fundamentalists are the Catholic,

Evangelical and Spiritualist churches, as well as self-titled “pro-life” sectors. The fundamentalist presence is extensive in the national legislature. A Religious Bloc, composed of representatives from the three churches mentioned above (and affiliated with various parties), works to oppose important sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), such as the legalization of abortion, and seeks the criminalization of homophobia, utilizing conservative arguments based on literal and anachronistic interpretations of the Bible. In parliament, three alliances of legislators that oppose abortion have submitted various bills to protect the “rights of the unborn.” They are organizing an Investigative Committee to bring legal proceedings against women who have had abortions.

Bill 1135/1991 was first submitted in 1991. However, the hostile political environment since then has meant that the bill’s supporters (including CFEMEA) have been concerned that if it comes up for a plenary vote in the Chamber of Deputies, it will be defeated and then removed from the parliament’s agenda altogether. So instead the bill’s supporters have worked to ensure that the bill was debated in various parliamentary committees without ever being put to a vote. In 2007, the Evangelical deputy, Jorge Mudalen, chair of the Committee on Security and the Family (CSF), submitted the bill for discussion again, and CFEMEA and its allies were obliged to act.

Strategies

Monitoring: Every day, CFEMEA checks the websites of the Chamber of Deputies and the Federal Senate to see which bills have been added to the agenda. CFEMEA studies these bills and formulates appropriate strategies. CFEMEA also surveys elected representatives each term to learn their position on SRHR issues. For bill 1135/1991, CFEMEA planned activities to prevent it from being debated at a time when it was likely to be defeated by fundamentalist-influenced Deputies.

Collaboration: Coordinating with feminist and women’s movements via listservs or electronic discussion forums, and in-person forums to draft documents and lobby political forces in the different states.

Lobbying allied legislators and parliamentary advocacy: Through these activities, CFEMEA was able to postpone the debate on bill 1135/1991 until the following year (2008). However, the new chair of the CSF, also an Evangelist, put the bill up for a vote. CFEMEA’s allied representatives withdrew in protest over the chair’s manipulation of the rules. With similar tactics, another Evangelical deputy, Eduardo Cunha, placed the bill on the agenda of the Constitution, Justice and Citizenship Committee (CCJC), which he chaired. CFEMEA worked with

its allies to submit technical appeals and call hearings with experts. In both committees, the debates and vote were very emotional and full of religious arguments and moralistic, conservative and misogynistic speeches; in the end, a majority on both committees rejected the bill. The bill's supporters within parliament hope to have kept it on the parliamentary agenda by using a procedural mechanism; they are awaiting the outcome of their action.

Working with the media: In addition to ongoing communication with the press, CFEMEA—with other organizations and an allied deputy—organized a training to present the results of a study on the reality of unsafe abortion in maternity hospitals in the northeast of the country, which demonstrated the real cost of the criminalization of abortion on women's lives.

Special events for mobilization and exchanging experiences: CFEMEA participated in three national conferences (each attended by an average of 2,500 people) and, together with other feminist organizations, organized a seminar entitled Latin American Strategies for the Legalization of Abortion and Women's Reproductive Autonomy, as well as a book of the same name. In September 2008, CFEMEA helped to create the National Front to End the Criminalization of Women and for the Legalization of Abortion, which was inaugurated in São Paulo with a march of 600 people.

Looking Ahead

Among successful strategies, CFEMEA would highlight working with the media to inform and mobilize society around what happens in the National Congress, but believes that it needed to focus more on political parties in the different states (the Federative Republic of Brazil is formed of 26 states). In 2010 there will be elections in Brazil and opposition to women's reproductive rights will continue to be important for conservative candidates. It will be necessary to increase dialogue with more sectors of Brazilian society that are also being targeted by fundamentalists. The lack of funding and of consensus among feminists regarding strategies to legalize abortion, as well as the strength of the fundamentalist sectors are some of the obstacles CFEMEA sees for the future. But there are also signs in society and among government sectors of an increasing openness to the legalization of abortion. These signs, together with sound strategies and feminists' experience, keep their hopes of advancing SRHR in Brazil alive.

www.cfemea.org.br

Religious Fundamentalisms and the Therapeutic Abortion Protocol in Arequipa, Peru

Foro Regional por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos
Ydalid Rojas Salinas

Context

In Peru, the Catholic church—which is hegemonic and whose doctrine functions as an element of social cohesion—has been and continues to be the main obstacle to political advances in the area of women's sexual and reproductive rights, which have grown out of the ongoing secularization of the state. These rights are opposed by Catholic fundamentalist sectors that see the “defence of life” as a battleground where they must be increasingly vigilant and forceful. This is exactly what occurred in 2007 in Arequipa, one of the most economically active regions of the country, when a coalition of feminist organizations—the Foro por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos (Regional Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights)—secured the approval of the regional government for a protocol on therapeutic abortion that would operationalize the 1924 Penal Code provisions permitting abortion to save the life and protect the health of the pregnant woman. However, the protocol was quickly overturned as a result of the efforts of fundamentalist Catholic groups, which have strong ties to the political groups in power.

El Foro Regional por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos

The Foro is a network of groups, organizations and independent professionals that advocate for women's rights and/or sexual and reproductive health. It was created in 2006, and its main objective is to advocate for public policies supporting the sexual and reproductive freedoms of women in Arequipa Department in Peru.

Opposition

In Peru, conservative Catholic groups with ties to international organizations have created a network with the goal of imposing their particular interests on public policies and weakening protections for sexual and reproductive rights. The case study by the Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos

(PROMSEX, Centre for the Promotion and Defence of Sexual and Reproductive Rights) includes a detailed analysis of each of these groups. In Arequipa, the Sodalicio de la Vida Cristiana (SVC, Society of Apostolic Life) is the most active group. It manages the Universidad Católica de San Pablo (UCSP), implements teacher training programs for the State and maintains the Centro de Ayuda para la Mujer (CAM, Support Centre for Women), which provides services to pregnant women, although never, in any case, abortion services. Various members of the UCSP board were or are part of the economic and political power structure, which explains the strong influence of the SVC in these areas.

Other important actors in the case analyzed here include the hierarchy of the Catholic church, CEPROFARENA (with ties to the powerful international conservative organization Vida Humana Internacional (VHI, Human Life International-HLI) and Proyecto Esperanza (Project Hope) from Chile, which identifies itself as “a support program for men and women who have lost a child before its birth, especially due to induced abortion, and are suffering from post-abortion syndrome.” When the Therapeutic Abortion Protocol was approved, these groups mobilized their vast network of powerful political supporters regionally and nationally, organized marches to defend the “rights of the unborn child,” and enlisted the support of the media and scientists to disseminate their statements and vilify anyone opposing them.

Strategies

Peru has the second highest maternal mortality rate in Latin America (410 deaths per 100,000 births) and it is estimated that 16% of maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortion. The Foro was created during a workshop organized by PROMSEX in Arequipa in 2006 to mobilize organizations throughout the country in response to Peru’s lack of policies addressing this serious issue.

a) One of the Foro’s first initiatives was to create and present the Plan Regional para la Atención de la Salud Sexual y Reproductiva 2007-2010 (Regional Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health) to the Regional Health Council. The plan included a protocol of care for legal abortion, which provided guarantees and certainty to health providers by helping them to clearly identify some of the conditions that endanger women’s lives and that may be grounds for a legal termination of pregnancy.

b) In order to sensitize the professionals involved, the Foro co-organized, with the Regional Health Management Office, the highest health authority in Arequipa, two workshops for gynaecologists and obstetricians to address the issue of abortion and formulate a protocol. In December

2007, the protocol was approved, and in February 2008, it was publicly announced, giving rise to the fundamentalist reaction. In the subsequent confrontation, the Foro worked to sensitize and seek the support of diverse professional associations. At the beginning, these groups responded positively. However, in the end, the Medical Association gave in to fundamentalist pressure and withdrew its support, although the Bar Association stayed firm in its commitment. The Foro widely disseminated scientific opinions supporting the Protocol, which it had collected during its work sensitizing and involving professionals in the issue.

c) The Foro went to local newspapers and gave television and radio interviews to explain the content and relevance of the Protocol. As has been pointed out, they had to respond to fundamentalists’ positions in the media.

d) To demonstrate that the Protocol was needed to save women’s lives, the Foro organized and publicized the campaign “El aborto terapéutico es legal y puede salvar tu vida, cuéntanos tu historia (Therapeutic abortion is legal and can save your life; tell us your story),” which collected testimonies from women who had undergone abortions.

Looking Ahead

In April 2008, the Regional Health Management Office definitively overturned the Protocol after having been given a technical-legal report from the Council of Ministers, which in 2007 had claimed that only the National Congress had the authority to draft such a protocol. In May of the same year, PROMSEX filed a lawsuit demanding that the Ministry of Health approve a national protocol on therapeutic abortion. The Foro had high hopes of a positive ruling since the Constitutional Court had previously ruled that the distribution of free emergency contraception by the Ministry of Health was constitutional. However, in November 2009, the Court reversed its position and now the ministry is prohibited from distributing emergency contraception for free in Peru, thereby setting a worrisome precedent for this latest petition to the court.

Stones Aimed at Us: An Overview of the Discourse and Strategies of the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign

Stop Stoning Forever Campaign

Shadi Sadr

Governmental Religious Fundamentalism in Iran

Following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran saw the emergence of “governmental religious fundamentalism” which attempted to fully integrate religion and politics. Rapid Islamization was the new government’s main strategy, used to gain legitimacy and define its identity; women and issues affecting women were regarded as the best vehicle for this process.

Stoning in Iran

Making all extra-marital sexual relationships a crime against the state and therefore deserving of harsh punishments was crucial to the theocratic government’s control over society. The first case of a woman being stoned to death was reported in July 1980. However, stoning constituted a point of tension between the fundamentalist and the “pragmatic” factions of the government, the latter believing that the implementation of stoning harmed the image of the Islamic Republic in the world’s eyes. As a result, stoning sentences were increasingly implemented in secret rather than in public, while media coverage was prohibited. In 2002, when the pragmatists were in power, it was announced that executions by stoning had been stopped. However, the emergence of the fundamentalist government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 started a new era of Islamization.

Emergence of the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign

In May 2006, two people were stoned to death in Mashhad, leading women’s rights activists to discuss how best to raise the issue in the context of repression and censorship. A few months later, a woman named Ashraf Kalhori was informed she was to be stoned to death in 15 days’ time. This provided the catalyst for the creation of the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign.

The Campaign aims primarily to eliminate stoning provisions from the Islamic Penal Code of Iran. It also defends women sentenced to stoning and appeals their cases. The Campaign brings a gender perspective to

the analysis of stoning, placing it in the broader context of discriminatory policies and practices that affect Iranian women; for every 12 women sentenced to stoning, only two men faced the same sentence. The practice of stoning in Iran results from a combination of governmental religious fundamentalism, patriarchy and other forms of discrimination such as class and ethnicity; by advocating against stoning, the Campaign challenges these root causes.

Strategies of the Campaign

International pressure: Due to widespread repression and censorship, the Campaign had limited opportunities to directly pressure the Iranian government. So Campaign activists work with allies in international civil society to build pressure to end stoning. This international pressure forced the Iranian authorities to formally respond and gradually the media began to publish news and analysis by the Campaign.

Stoning as a symbol for all discrimination: During its advocacy work, the Campaign realized that stoning could serve as a starting point for a broader discussion of gender discrimination. Campaign activists showed how women sentenced to stoning were victims of forced and underage marriages, poverty, ethnic discrimination, unrelenting domestic violence and deprivation of their human rights, including the right to divorce. This helped establish a broad discussion in society on women’s rights in general. This in turn created a space where taboo subjects such as consensual sexual relations outside of marriage and the freedom to choose one’s sexual partners could be discussed.

Technology and virtual campaigning: Due to the crackdown on civil society after 2005, the Campaign had limited opportunities to hold meetings and activities in public. But after a successful virtual campaign to save Mokarrameh Ebrahimi from being stoned in 2007, Campaign activists recognized the power of technology. *Meydaan-e-Zanan* (Women’s Field), the official website of the Campaign and other initiatives against the new wave of governmental fundamentalism, provided a platform for networking and collaboration among various anti-fundamentalist initiatives that was not dependent on an office that could be shut down by the authorities. *Meydaan-e-Zanan* became the Campaign’s most effective tool over the next few years.

Secular framework and alliances with religious authorities: The Campaign primarily worked within a secular framework, but also encouraged religious elites to use their expertise to show how stoning is un-Islamic and issue new *fatwas*, or religious opinions, saying so. Although as secular feminists they could not legitimately enter religious dialogues, they could nevertheless present women’s needs and social realities and achieve their

objectives through an unwritten coalition with the pragmatists and religious reformists. This experience proves that even under a religious fundamentalist government, there is a secular way of fighting by obtaining legitimacy through the voices of silenced women.

Building global solidarity: The Campaign sought to build global solidarity against stoning and the use of cultural excuses for killing women. It also sought an international mechanism that could force the Iranian government to abolish honour-related penal provisions such as stoning. In 2007, in collaboration with Women Living Under Muslim Laws, the Global Campaign To Stop Killing and Stoning Women was launched in Turkey.

Looking Forward

The Stop Stoning Forever Campaign has enjoyed significant success. Out of 20 cases it appealed, seven women and one man were rescued from stoning and released from prison; others have had sentences commuted. In addition, pressure by the Campaign in the last year has led to major legal developments. With the international community carefully observing Iran's human rights situation following the 2009 presidential election, Parliament passed a new Penal Code which has omitted the sentence of stoning. However, the bill still awaits approval of the Parliament and Guardian Council.

At the same time, over the past three years Iran has faced a new wave of governmental religious fundamentalism that targets all aspects of women's lives through policy and legislation. The objective is to reverse some of the hard-won gains made by Iranian women in recent years, and to return to some of the harshest policies of the early post-Revolution period. This includes reintroducing severe penalties such as stoning for extra-marital sexual relations; advocating for the easing of restrictions on polygamy; enforcing stricter dress codes; increasing gender segregation in universities and public spaces; and restricting girls from attending universities and reducing women's working hours.

The long and difficult struggle against fundamentalism, as the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign exemplifies, can provide lessons for women in other countries who are fighting a similar battle. Ultimately what global women's movement activists can learn from the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign is that religious fundamentalism is not an issue that solely concerns Iranian women. Even though activists in other countries may not struggle with stoning *per se*, the rocks of fundamentalism are being aimed at women everywhere.

www.meydaan.net/english

Religious Fundamentalisms and Communalism: The Case of Sahiyar

Sahiyar (Stree Sanghthan)

Trupti Shah

With a population of more than one billion, India claims to be one of the world's largest democracies, yet it continues to experience new levels of conflict along the lines of caste, class, gender, religion, region, culture, sexual orientation, language and ethnicity. In this multi-religious context, the spread of communal ideology and violence is an important fundamentalist strategy. The major fundamentalist forces in Gujarat are connected to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological centre of the "family" of Hindu nationalist organizations known as the Sangh Parivar. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Sangh Parivar's political wing, is the largest national political party after the Congress. The BJP has been the ruling party in the state of Gujarat since 1995, and was in power at the national level in 2002 when Gujarat experienced unparalleled violence, principally targeting the Muslim minority. After the events of 2002, Gujarat was openly pronounced as a laboratory of Hindutva (the Hindu supremacist political ideology that calls for a Hindu nation).

Sahiyar (Stree Sanghthan)

Sahiyar was founded in 1984 in Vadodara, Gujarat with the long-term vision of a society free from inequality, injustice and atrocity. As part of India's autonomous women's movement, it campaigns on a range of issues including domestic violence, personal laws, sexual harassment, dowry, sex-selective abortion, rape and sexual violence during caste and communal riots. Sahiyar sees women's oppression and subordination as intricately connected with all other forms of marginalization, and seeks to build a common front for human rights and communal harmony with other progressive forces in Gujarat.

Strategies

Over the years, Sahiyar has evolved diverse strategies to resist fundamentalisms and address a broad spectrum of social groups:

Using media: To counter the campaigns of communal media and Hindutva forces, Sahiyar publishes leaflets written in simple Gujarati that contain facts about recent incidents of communal violence, analysis of communal politics and firsthand stories of women from Hindu and Muslim communities. Sahiyar also makes innovative use of street plays and *garba* (Gujarati folkdance), combining popular traditional tunes with modern lyrics to convey complex secular and feminist messages which would otherwise be difficult to explain to those with less formal education.

Training and building capacity: Sahiyar organizes trainings for grassroots women leaders from communally sensitive areas to enable them to intervene in crisis situations and local issues. The Women's Leadership for Justice, Peace and Communal Harmony program is part of a long-term strategy for challenging patriarchal social structures and value systems. Sessions cover feminist and organizing concepts, constitutional and fundamental rights, personal laws, and strategies to combat communal politics and violence.

Building strategic alliances: As most of its core group members were Hindu by birth, Sahiyar joined the Muslim Women's Rights Network to build solidarity for women's rights in Muslim communities. Sahiyar networks not only with women's organizations, but also human rights groups, trade unions, diverse social and political formations, non-governmental organizations, artists and academics at local, national and international levels. While members of a collective may not agree on all aspects of an agenda, Sahiyar works to establish a common platform for action.

Sahiyar's Response to the Violence of 2002

Following the violence of 2002, Sahiyar allied with progressive organizations to form a common forum called the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and Shanti Abhiyan (Peace Campaign). The activities undertaken by the PUCL-SA included:

Organizing awareness-raising programs, peace committees and vigils: When the violence started, the forum organized public demonstrations, as well as peace committees and vigils in areas where forum activists had a strong local presence and community contacts. During the height of the riots, activists went to stay in the affected areas and contacted people from both communities to ensure that they would not initiate attacks. These actions built trust among local residents, and helped to secure peace amid the violence that engulfed the state.

Working with the police and administration: As the police were slow to intervene in the riots, activists offered the Police Commissioner their voluntary services to maintain a state of calm in the city. They secured curfew passes to travel in the affected areas and circulated their phone numbers for people to use in moments of crisis. Each emergency phone call was followed by a fax to the Commissioner's office with the details of the conversation, thus preventing distortion of the facts. People were advised to send faxes to police commissioners with copies marked to PUCL-SA and the National Human Rights Commission, which helped to prevent the intensification of violence.

Conducting fact-finding missions: Forum activists conducted fact-finding missions in riot-affected areas, and supported fact-finding teams and journalists from other areas to obtain information about the events. The PUCL-SA prepared a report about the violence in Vadodara as well as a report about the experiences of women, and presented these to several national and international human rights forums.

Working for relief and rehabilitation: As the government failed to provide relief to the victims of violence, forum activists worked closely with relief camp organizers to provide basic necessities, emotional support and counselling. They also helped to file reports with the police and other authorities, assisted affected people in demanding government compensation, and supported rehabilitation by skills-training or other supports for finding a means of livelihood.

Engaging in satyagraha against police atrocities: During later phases of violence, women were subject to extreme forms of harassment during police combing operations. PUCL-SA organized a *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) campaign, in which activists and Muslim women and men peacefully broke curfew to deliver themselves unarmed to police abuse. Under public pressure created by the action, the Police Commissioner committed to launching an inquiry against guilty police personnel.

Looking Ahead

To prevent violent episodes in other states, Sahiyar's representatives serve as speakers or resource persons on the issue of communal violence in public meetings, workshops and seminars. Highlighting the lack of widespread social condemnation of communal violence, and the lack of hope for legal justice for the survivors, Sahiyar seeks to convey that the long-term consequences of silence affect all communities through the normalization of violence, particularly violence against women, and the dehumanizing brutality of sexual violence.

Associazione Luca Coscioni and the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research: An Italian Experience of Resisting Religious Fundamentalisms

Associazione Luca Coscioni per la libertà di ricerca scientifica
Carmen Sorrentino

Religious fundamentalisms launch a systematic assault on knowledge which promotes freedom, tolerance and economic development. In Italy, attempts to curtail the freedom of scientific research are made by the Vatican along with socially conservative politicians and conscientious objectors. These groups actively oppose stem cell research, cloning, euthanasia and the right to die, while their opposition to women's sexual and reproductive rights continues to work against the adoption of new laws or the enforcement of existing ones that recognize the self-determination of women, with specific attention to such issues as family planning, contraception, abortion and assisted reproduction.

The Associazione Luca Coscioni per la libertà di ricerca scientifica (Luca Coscioni Association for Freedom of Scientific Research, ALC) was founded in 2002 with the aim of resisting religious, dogmatic and morality-based interventions against the freedom of scientific research as well as attacks against self-determination in choices concerning life, the right to die, health treatment, reproduction and the family. ALC brings together political and scientific figures, along with civil rights advocates and representatives of patients' associations, to address a range of issues related to human rights and science. Initially established as a non-profit organization in Italy, ALC quickly branched out into a permanent international forum with the launch of the World Congress for Freedom of Scientific Research in 2006. ALC currently has over 2,000 members, including MPs, researchers, students, academics, and ordinary citizens who are active in its campaigns worldwide.

ALC's Strategies

ALC's strategies build upon its association with the Nonviolent Radical Party, transnational and transparty (Partito Radicale Nonviolento, transnazionale e transpartito), a bastion of liberalism in Italy. Drawing on the party's 50 years' experience, ALC's methods begin from the principles of non-violence, transnationalism and transparty alliances. ALC operates according to Gandhi's non-violent precepts, using civil disobedience and hunger strikes (which they prefer to refer to as "dialogue fasting").

Direct and popular action: Since 2006, ALC has been involved in a campaign promoting legalization of euthanasia in Italy. A petition to the Italian Parliament (supported by over 20,000 signatories) demands that Parliament conduct a survey on the practice of clandestine euthanasia in Italy. ALC members demonstrated in front of the Senate with a ten-metre banner that spelled out "Euthanasia" using the names of the petition's signatories. The organization operates through an activist network at national and international levels, along with citizens' support, through petitions and appeals, often with the direct involvement of Nobel Prize laureates. For example, in 2006, the organization launched a petition calling on the European Parliament to ensure allocation of funds for research on stem cells obtained from supernumerary embryos, as well as research on nuclear transfer. Several scientists, policy-makers, representatives of patients' associations, and 11 Nobel Prize winners signed this petition.

Knowledge building and information sharing: ALC seeks to raise public awareness of rights and their practical applications. In 2004, Italy introduced a law prohibiting assisted reproduction for those without a partner or for homosexual couples, and also prohibiting research on supernumerary embryos and heterologous fertilization (donation of sperm or eggs from a third party). ALC believes that assisted reproduction should be the right of every adult male or female citizen, and its website provides information about European centres offering treatments that are otherwise forbidden in Italy. In 2007, ALC also launched an initiative to help patients and citizens safeguard their rights and liberties through a self-help, interactive manual, *Soccorso Civile - Manuale di autodifesa dal proibizionismo sulla salute (Civil Rescue - A self-defence manual against health prohibitionism)*. The portal evolves and adds content based on user contributions, and an email address and comments section on each page ensure interactivity and encourage the sharing of practical experiences.

Legal and advocacy support: ALC offers support to those willing to expose or denounce breaches or malpractices in the field of emergency

contraception. During 2008, for example, in some Italian cities where a public structure refused to prescribe the morning after pill, women could immediately access medical assistance by calling ALC's volunteer doctors to obtain the prescription and the assistance necessary to denounce the physicians and structures that had denied their right.

Building alliances: In the Italian context, ALC fights alongside infertile patients' associations, women's rights associations, university students' associations and gynecologists for the overall adoption of assisted reproduction technologies, pharmacological abortion and non-prescription access to emergency contraception. ALC's allies also include advocacy associations, representatives of minority religious groups, international scientists and politicians, Nobel laureates, but above all citizens who also may be believers. On an international level, in 2004, ALC launched a campaign to discourage the adoption of a binding UN convention banning all forms of cloning, with no distinction between reproductive and therapeutic cloning. Four months of international mobilization in coordination with ALC's allies succeeded in substantially watering down the proposal into a non-binding declaration.

Youth outreach and mobilization: In 2007, ALC created the Studenti Coscioni, a network of high school and university students from all over the country who have been campaigning for the commercialization of emergency contraception as a non-prescription drug in Italy, as well as a campaign for condom distribution and sexual information programs in secondary schools, universities and public squares. Younger members have also taken part in Scuola Estiva Luca Coscioni, ALC's summer school on liberalism and free research. ALC is also actively promoting Scolarmente, a project targeting high schools and aimed at improving knowledge of the scientific method as an instrument for critical thinking and democratic processes.

Looking Ahead

Contrary to its opponents' claims, ALC is not in favour of total de-regulation on such controversial issues as euthanasia or research on embryonic stem cells, but rather promotes a legal framework to control clandestine abuses while taking into account the right of patients and human beings to determine their own lives without restrictions based on fideistic or other non-rational arguments. In the face of future challenges from religious fundamentalisms, ALC's primary concern will remain the promotion of the scientific method in Italy and worldwide as a means of strengthening critical thinking and democratic processes.

www.lucacoscioni.it

Religious Fundamentalisms and Student Life: A View from Indonesia

Nathanael G. Sumaktoyo and Yuyun Rindiastuti

While Islam is the religion of the majority of the population, Indonesia is not legally an Islamic state. President Soeharto (1967-1998) established Pancasila (Five Principles) as the sole ideological basis of the nation and all political parties. Soeharto's "New Order" emphasized national integrity over religious identity, putting the president at odds with many Islamic groups that envisioned Islam as the nation's ideology. In 1998, mass demonstrations forced Soeharto to resign, and in the following years, many predominantly Muslim fundamentalist groups began to take shape, along with new religious political parties that campaigned to incorporate so-called Islamic laws into legislation. Since Soeharto's fall, the transformation of Indonesia's political system has included a radical change in power relations between Jakarta and provincial and local governments. Developments since have made Indonesia one of the most decentralized states in the world. Since regional autonomy provisions were implemented in 2004, many local governments have introduced legislation said to be derived from *syariah* (Bahasa Indonesia for Islamic law). These should technically only affect Muslims but in fact are impacting other citizens as well.

Islamic Student Organizations

Student movements were central to many of the political transformations in Indonesia's recent history and played a pivotal role in the birth and development of the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS or Prosperous Justice Party), now a prominent Islamic party. The growing popularity of the PKS can in part be attributed to a "two-track strategy" that highlights both "Islamic issues" (including Palestine and Muslim world solidarity) as well as "non-Islamic issues" (such as anti-corruption and clean government). Declaring itself a modern and inclusive Islamic party with a focus on prosperity and justice, the PKS presents its youth leaders as agents of change and is popular among educated youth.

The PKS is said to have the most organized recruitment system and the most solid base of supporters of any party. Its history cannot be separated from campus *dakwah* (calling or preaching) movement; In the 1970s, the development of the *dakwah* movement built upon a religious resurgence among well-educated *Muslims*, and university mosques became centres for *dakwah* activities. In 1998, this network gave rise to KAMMI or Indonesian Muslim Student Action Union whose activists tend to occupy influential positions in student senates.

Influence on Women's Rights

In the post-Soeharto era, education policies in Indonesia have had a negative impact on pluralism, where students learn only about their own religion at every level from elementary school to college. This policy opens the door to a formal transfer of extreme religious views from teachers to students, such as the rejection of female or non-Muslim leaders, and widespread opposition to pluralism.

Fundamentalisms can also be seen as influencing campus norms including the continuous pressure for women to wear the *jilbab* (headscarf). It can also be noted in the lack of acceptance of women in leadership positions which is particularly marked in non-secular universities, and witnessed in the passing of local laws said to be based on principles of *syariah* but that in fact are in violation of women's rights.

Strategies

Media campaign: In 2006, one of the authors published an inter-campus bulletin, *Warna Bangsa* (Colour of the Nation), which advocated pluralism and opposed fundamentalism. Four editions were published over six months. The third edition focused entirely on women, presenting information about a famous Indonesian feminist and critiquing recent gender-biased laws. Unlike other student publications, *Warna Bangsa* targeted students who were uninterested rather than engaged in politics. To do this, it used common language and avoided provocative and complex discourses, making an effort to consider what and how readers want to read, rather than what and how we want to communicate.

The experience provided useful learnings. First, while a publication can serve to stimulate an individual's thoughts, it does not create change until the reader is willing to confront social pressure. Second, bulletins and other publications serve as informational rather than campaign tools. This is particularly relevant for publications focused on political and social issues, which tend to appeal more to people who have already taken a position, rather than those who are undecided.

The one-on-one approach: Religious fundamentalism creates a heavy dependence on authority, either the scripture itself or the person who interprets it. Once indoctrinated, students often lose the courage to act freely. In this context, we have employed the one-on-one approach, which leverages established friendships to discuss and debate the idea of freedom. Rather than cite scriptural verses and compare them with fundamentalist interpretations, we mainly use secular arguments in discussions. However, in dialogues with highly religious people, the inability to cite verses can be a disadvantage. As individuals do not generally open themselves to the ideas of people they do not trust, one of the strengths of the one-on-one approach is that friendship eases the persuasion process. Friendship involves trust, and trust serves to "open the mind."

Fundamentalist groups rely on a similar strategy, offering security, acceptance and friendship. In employing the personal approach as a counter-fundamentalist strategy, we provide what fundamentalist groups do, though on a much smaller scale and toward an opposite end. This approach is limited in scope as it can only be attempted with individuals with whom we have close relations, and can be somewhat time-consuming. But because friendship is an important aspect of student life, it can be leveraged to promote acceptance and respect for diversity.

Looking Ahead

In the future, religious fundamentalisms will pose the most likely threat to women's rights and pluralism in Indonesia. In this case study of religious revivalism in the post-Soeharto era, the impacts of patriarchal culture and socio-political turbulence on women's rights are evident. In countering fundamentalist influence, a challenge for human rights organizations is to reach lay people and communicate as they do. We must advocate for more inclusive network building that provides both friendship and accessible information, and we must also make an effort to engage more concertedly with youth. Fundamentalist groups have worked to project a modern and youth-friendly image. Human rights movements may consider using a similar strategy.

Challenging the Growing Power of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Public Life: The Case of Women in Black-Serbia

Women in Black-Serbia*

Staša Zajović and Katie Mahuron

Since the fall of communism in the former Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church has come to assert a powerful role in the public sphere. Increasingly a key factor in state policy, the church also interferes directly with the work of pedagogical, educational, cultural and information-providing institutions. Using the nationalist rhetoric of a divinely ordained “Greater Serbia” (which would today take up much of the former Yugoslavia), the church portrays itself as the keeper of Serbian identity. At the core of this discourse is the unbreakable unity of nation, state and church, a construction that excludes those who are not Orthodox from claiming a Serbian identity. Since the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, the church has become heavily involved with the Democratic Party of Serbia and has allied with ultra-right wing and ethno-nationalist forces, presenting a growing threat to women’s and human rights in Serbia.

Women in Black-Belgrade

Women in Black-Belgrade (Žene u Crnom-Beograd) was formed in 1991 in response to the conflict between the former Yugoslav republics. The network launched a non-violent public protest against war, nationalism, militarism and all forms of discrimination, and continues to challenge the growing power of the Serbian Orthodox Church in public life. Actively working to research and document the impact of religious fundamentalism, its extensive program also includes education, street actions, coalition building and lobbying. In this effort, Women in Black has built important local and international networks, which are vital to the ongoing fight against fundamentalisms throughout the world.

* Women in Black, Women in Black Belgrade, and Women in Black Serbia are used interchangeably by the authors of this case study.

Women in Black’s Strategies and Activities

Education: As an essential first step in the struggle against fundamentalism, Women in Black works to educate activists and citizens to be able to recognize the warning signs of fundamentalisms in their own communities, and to understand local fundamentalism as part of a rising global trend. The network’s educational program also includes democratic and feminist responses to fundamentalisms within Serbia and in a global context. Seminars held throughout the country focus on training local women community leaders across generations, ethnic groups, social statuses, educational levels, religious backgrounds and sexual orientations. Sessions combine lectures and workshops and employ a multidisciplinary approach, balancing academic knowledge and activist experience. Participants learn not only to identify and challenge fundamentalism, but also to educate others in their communities about fundamentalist trends—a strategy that can serve to ignite a larger pattern of resistance. Public lectures, panel debates and discussions are also a key component of this educational program, bringing together academics, artists, activists, politicians, and ordinary citizens into a collective dialogue.

Writing back: Writing and publishing have long been central components of Women in Black’s activism. The network produces books, anthologies, pamphlets, leaflets and articles, and whenever possible, publishes in Serbian, English, Albanian and Hungarian. Just as historians and mainstream media have long used publishing to mythologize the role of the church in Serbian identity, Women in Black sees its activities as one method of “writing back” to these recognized authorities, and of protesting a single recognized narrative. *What Every Citizen Should Know* is a series of publications discussing key issues such as abortion, gender roles, tolerance, war, secularism and the relationship between church and state. These booklets are printed in the style of the prayer books and religious pamphlets disseminated by the Serbian Orthodox Church, an ironic aesthetic deconstruction that reflects Women in Black’s politically engaged artistic approach.

Street actions: Women in Black-Serbia began in the street in 1991 and believes that street actions are essential for increasing public awareness and energizing a movement. The network uses both traditional and creative street actions to momentarily disrupt the daily lives of Serbian citizens. One example involved activists removing items of clothing while standing in front of the Patriarchate in Belgrade to demonstrate that there is nothing sinful about a woman’s body and that the church should not dictate what Serbian women can and cannot wear in public. In this specific case, the activists involved did not face any immediate backlash, although verbal and physical attacks are a common experience with such street actions.

Networking and coalition building: Networking and coalition building have proven essential to Women in Black's work against fundamentalism in Serbia. The network also engages in lobbying campaigns, recognizing the importance of participating in democratic processes. In response to the proposed Law on Churches and Religious Communities, which would give the Serbian Orthodox Church extraordinary legal rights, Women in Black founded the Coalition for a Secular State alongside a number of civil society organizations. In 2006, the Coalition held a series of public meetings to discuss the law, drafted a number of amendments, and subsequently lobbied the Serbian Parliament to pass the amendments. While this campaign was not successful, it served as an important learning experience for coalition members, who strengthened their knowledge, experience, resources and local, national and international networks by uniting their efforts.

Looking Ahead

Each year, Women in Black co-ordinates a nationwide research project to document the voices of a diverse population of Serbian women. In 2008, it launched Reproductive Rights and the Revival of Traditionalism, a survey that revealed a gap between the stance of the Serbian Orthodox Church on sexual and reproductive rights and the views held by younger women in Serbia. For example, most female believers felt that they had the right to make decisions regarding their bodies and reproductive choices, and did not consider abortion to be murder. The study revealed that the fundamentalist model of sexuality has nothing to do with the experiences of Serbian women, and has not yet had a significant impact on their self-awareness. While fundamentalist forces in Serbia seem to only be growing in power, these findings indicate the potential for challenging the imposition of reactionary attitudes on society's beliefs and ideals. The country has a strong and active anti-fundamentalist movement, and as a part of this movement, Women in Black continues its efforts to educate, network, collaborate, and to think creatively to counter fundamentalist trends.

www.zeneucrnom.org

In every region and religious context, women's rights activists are resisting and challenging fundamentalisms. The summaries of 18 case studies presented here illustrate a range of inspiring local initiatives by women's rights organizations and their allies to address this global issue.

Drawn from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, South and Southeast Asia, these case study summaries highlight activist strategies in practice and, along with a synthesis of key learnings, bring to light the extraordinary scope of women's creativity and determination.

The full case studies are available online at www.awid.org.