

CONTESTING RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS AND
OTHER FORMS OF INTOLERANCE
Practical and Theoretical Challenges for the
Global Feminist Movement

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Abstract: This paper defines religious fundamentalisms as modern political projects. It asserts fundamentalist groups vary, but they have a common agenda around the control of women and their sexuality. The paper discusses certain theoretical challenges posed by fundamentalisms and explores some feminist responses to these. It asserts a need for a thoroughgoing defense of women's human rights in light of the fundamentalist resurgence, as secularism must be redefined to uphold principles of overall equality and gender equality.

In recent years, the term “religious fundamentalism” has become highly contested. Much of the literature on the matter recognizes this even as there is affirmation that the term remains politically useful. (Freedman 1995, Sahgal and Yuval Davis 2000, Ter Haar 2002, Bennoune 2007).

The term religious fundamentalism was first used by a group of orthodox Protestants in the United States, which published a series of pamphlets entitled “The Fundamentals” (Ter Haar 2002) at the turn of twentieth century. The articles were written in response to the rise of liberalism in US society and the Social Gospel Movement, both of which brought progressive elements to Christianity (Sahgal and Yuval Davis 2000).

The contemporary use of the term is traced to the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The term was used in the press at that time to refer to the resistance by the believers in Islam to Western cultural and political values. In 1981, Anthony Burgess in the “Observer” claimed that there were similarities between *Mein Kampf* and the Quran and referred to, “the dangerous fundamentalism revived by the ayatollahs and their admirers as a device, indistinguishable from a weapon, for running a modern state” (quoted in Ter Haar 2002, 3).

In the light of the upsurge of political activism in the Muslim world and the “war on terror” of the US administration under George W. Bush, the association of the term “fundamentalist” to Islam, is one of the reasons that the term has become politically charged.

On the other hand, religious fundamentalism occurs in all the major world religions. The Christian fundamentalist right has become predominant in the United States during the presidency of George W. Bush (Phillips 2006). Fundamentalism thrives in the Vatican, at the highest levels of the Roman Catholic hierarchy (Kissling 2003).

When used in relation to religion, the term fundamentalism connotes the imposition of a single interpretation of religious doctrine and hostility towards contradiction or plurality (Sahgal and Yuval-Davis 2002). Religious fundamentalists often romanticize or mythologize a pure past or tradition. An affirmation of this mythological past or tradition is then presented as a final or over-arching solution to contemporary social problems.

Modern, Global Political Projects

But the appeal to religious orthodoxy is but one element of the phenomenon. Religious fundamentalisms are global political projects. The goals of these projects vary with different groups, but there are broad commonalities (Sahgal 2006). Thus the plural term, “religious fundamentalisms,” better describes the phenomenon.

Because these are political in nature, religious fundamentalisms cannot be separated from other fundamentalist movements that are based on ethnicity, nationality or culture (Kessler 1996 cited in Berer and Ravindran 1996). Analyses of religious fundamentalist movements reveal cross cutting alliances with political parties, nationalist, ethnic and innumerable other political projects. These political alliances are true of Christian, Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist fundamentalisms (Berlet and Quigley 1995, Bartholomeusz and de Silva 1998, Patel 2004, Sahgal 2006).

Despite the stereotyping of religious fundamentalists as Muslim terrorists, the Christian right in the United States is also fundamentalist. It is also shaping geo-political relations globally, just as much as Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. As Jacques Delors, the former European Commission president, notes of the fusion of religion with nationalism in the U.S.: “the clash between

those who believe and those who don't believe will be a dominant aspect of relations [between the United States and Europe] in the coming years.” Dominique Moisi, another well-known commentator, elaborates on the U.S.-European divergence: “The combination of religion and nationalism in America is frightening. We feel betrayed by God and by nationalism, which is why we are building the European Union as a barrier to religious warfare” (cited in Philipps 2006).

Religious fundamentalisms are also closely associated with conservative politics characterized by various forms of intolerance ranging from racism, sexism, homophobia and elitism. Thus, despite the insistence on a single religious doctrine as the only “true” doctrine, alliances are formed between conservatives from various religious groups. Such alliances caught the world's attention in 1994 during the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (Freedman 1995). Ten years later, in November 2004, Catholic, Muslim and US-based Christian fundamentalists met in Doha to discuss a united opposition to feminist interventions in the United Nations. Designated Muslim and Christian groups and individuals who organized the first meeting have since cooperated on joint actions. These joint actions have been particularly troubling in the United Nations, where the alliance has worked through governmental delegations of several Arab countries. For example, a week after the Doha conference, the government of Qatar put forward a conservative resolution on the family to the UN General Assembly which was approved without a vote. This dismayed European countries and several others (Whitaker 2005).

Indeed one of the aspects of religious fundamentalism is that it has global, national and local effects. Religious fundamentalists can work formally through the state and informally through institutions and individuals. As has been mentioned fundamentalism can align itself with various religious doctrines. But it can also ally itself with various political trends in different countries. While a common facet is its allegiance to orthodoxy, even this has different forms. On the one hand it can present itself as the maintenance of traditional mainstream values and a refusal of cultural change. On the other hand, it can also present itself as a call for radical change by dismissing current norms as a corruption of purer and earlier tradition. Fundamentalism can also be a feature of powerful institutions with tremendous resources and transnational power or it can take root among oppressed minorities (Sahgal and Yuval Davis 1994).

A Threat to Women's Rights and Well-Being

Despite the impossibility of coming up with a simple definition, feminists confront the dire effects of the very real phenomenon that the term fundamentalisms designates. Regional meetings in the run up to Beijing plus 10 assessment warned that religious fundamentalisms were a threat to the goals of the Beijing platform (Sahgal 2006).

In 2005, the first-ever conference of women human rights defenders identified religious fundamentalists as a major threat (WHRnet). One of the key points of that conference illustrates the pervasiveness of fundamentalist power:

It is vital that individual states are held accountable for abuses of women human rights defenders at the hands of all state and non-state actors within their jurisdiction. This includes both fundamentalist and paramilitary groups, as well as communities and individuals responsible for these violations (WHRnet).

In 2006, UN Secretary General Koffi Anan stated that, "The politicization of culture in the form of religious 'fundamentalisms' in diverse geographic and religious contexts has become a serious challenge to efforts to secure women's human rights" (United Nations 2006, 30).

Controlling Women's Bodies and Violence Against Women

The reason for the detrimental effects on women's rights is that the control of women is a feature of religious fundamentalisms. It is arguably the most consistent common feature. This is related to another central feature of fundamentalisms, the establishment of an identity for its adherents. Thus national, ethnic, religious fundamentalisms use women and their bodies as markers to define insiders and outsiders. As Yuval Davis and Anthias (1989) state:

Women are affected by national and ethnic processes in several major ways. Some of these are central to the project of fundamentalism, which attempts to impose its unitary religious definition on the grouping and its symbolic order. The "proper" behaviour of women is used to signify the difference between those who belong and those who do not; women are also seen as "cultural carriers" of the grouping, who transmit group

culture to the future generation; the proper control in terms of marriage and divorce ensures that children who are born to those women are within the boundaries of the collectivity not only biologically but also symbolically (Yuval Davis and Anthias in Sahgal and Yuval Davis 2002, 14-15).

Again, this aspect of women being used as identity markers and culture bearers is a centuries-old process that has become intensely relevant today (Freeman 1996). Sexual violence by fundamentalist groups highlights the fact that a key area of contestation is the subordination of women's desires and sexuality by and for individual men and/or collective male privilege. Thus reproductive and sexual rights activists have always had to struggle against religious fundamentalisms, whether at local, national or international levels. Yet patriarchal control of women in society at large and in fundamentalist movements is multi-layered. These layers include social constructions of women's purity and honour that define a woman's personal identity along lines of communal identity whether this be familial, tribal, ethnic or national (Sahgal 2006). My analysis of purity and honour in Philippine culture (Estrada-Claudio 2002) for example, shows that a woman's humanity is measured by her sexual innocence before marriage and heterosexual exclusivity to her husband thereafter. Thus rape is seen as the loss of a woman's worth because it breaks either her sexual purity or her exclusivity. This sense of "dishonour" attached to women who choose relations outside those dictated by their culture is the justification for even more violence against women, such as honour killings or severe punishments under law. What is particularly unjust is that, in many instances, women who are forced to go against these rules by men are subject to punishment as well. It should also be noted that the enforcement of sexual norms is managed generally by regulating only women's actions, when it could also be achieved by regulating the actions of men. These norms and punishments, coded as ways to protect women or as norms of social decorum, generally work to regulate only women's bodies and their sexuality. This has led to massive violations of women's individual rights which are justified by an appeal to a greater collective good. It has also posed a challenge to the evolution of human rights theory and practice (Bennoune 2007).

Because women serve as markers for their group tribe, nation or culture, rape and sexual violence become an assault on her family or her entire community in situations of conflict. A bleak example is the rape and forced impregnation that accompanied the ethnic cleansing associated with the war in ex-Yugoslavia. Sexual violence has marked situations of conflict in

various settings that have involved fundamentalist groups. Rape and forced impregnation has also occurred in Algeria; by armed groups in Colombia as a means of humiliating the enemy group; as a conscious strategy of terrorizing an “opposing” ethnic or religious group in Rwanda and Gujarat (Bauer and Helie 2006).

Neoliberalism and Fundamentalisms

Fundamentalisms are implicated in the power shifts that have brought about the possibility of neo-liberal globalization. As Helie-Lucas (2004) notes:

Fundamentalisms are political movements of the extreme right, which, in a context of globalization, e.g., forceful international economic exploitation and free-for-all capitalism, manipulate religion, culture, or ethnicity, in order to achieve their political aims (25).

Yet even as fundamentalisms are a factor in the process of neo-liberal globalization, it may also be a reactive defense against the alienation, loss of identity, violence and economic hardships brought about by capitalist exploitation. Jennings (2000) describes the mindset of the fundamentalist family he grew up in:

Somehow this rising tide of prosperity never lapped at our doors and the Jennings family was a bitter family indeed. Poor whites descended from Confederate veterans, we eagerly sought out scapegoats for our inexplicable failure to “make it” in the land of opportunity. My uncles and cousins joined the Ku Klux Klan, while my father, a fundamentalist minister, used religion to excuse all his prejudices ---against blacks, against Jews, against Catholics, against Yankees, against Communists and liberals (basically the same thing, as far as he was concerned), and, of course, against gays. Somehow the golden rule of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” never made it into his gospel. Instead I remember church services filled with outbursts of paranoia, as we were warned against those whom we (incorrectly) held responsible for our very real oppression (641).

Jennings goes on to state that he was born in 1963 and graduated in 1981 in order to make the point that his story is not about “ancient history” (641). The point has been made however that religious fundamentalisms have a history that can date back centuries (Bartholomeusz and de Silva 1998,

Sahgal and Yuval Davis 2000, Kissling 2003). Still, globalization because of its heightening of insecurities and oppressions has led to its resurgence (Afary 1999).

Economic Fundamentalism

Neoliberal economics may be classified as a form of fundamentalism. Here again, singular interpretations of economic theory and “one-size fits all” economic prescriptions mark the terrain (Sachs 2000). Here again, the theoretical underpinnings make patriarchal assumptions about women and female sexuality as the ground for proposed solutions (Shiva 1999). Even in the academe, the “othering” of economists who go against the neo-liberal orthodoxy has been a matter of contestation and has spawned resistance (Post Autistic Economics Network). Helie-Lucas (2004) makes the link between fascisms, fundamentalism and capitalism explicit:

Fundamentalism is the form that fascism takes today. Like Nazism in Germany, it emerges in a context of economic crisis and pauperisation, builds itself on the discontent of the people, manipulates the poorer sections of the populations, exalts their moral values and their culture (Aryanity for Germany, the glorious past of Rome for Italy), covers itself with the blessing of their God (*Gott mit uns*, as the SS used to wear on their belts), wants to convert or submit the world, and eliminates and eradicates their political opponents as well as the *untermensch*. Far from being obscurantist and economically backwards, fundamentalists are modernist and capitalist (26).

An example of this admixture between capitalism and religion can be seen in the political base of the administration of George W. Bush (Philipps 2006). The rise of the religious right in the US in the 1990s turned dozens of fundamentalist and charismatic preachers into multi-millionaires with their best selling books, videos, televised programs and networks. These religious personalities, many of whom have become powerful supporters, of the Bush presidency, are ardently behind neo-liberal measures such as reduced tax cuts and economic regulations.

Wee (2006) reiterates this link: “In the current context of globalized capitalism, the idea of equality as a desired value is being made irrelevant, while the idea of inequality is being established as a ‘law of nature,’ ‘law of the jungle,’ ‘divine law,’ or the ‘will of God’” (3).

Like other fundamentalisms globalized capital resorts to fascist and undemocratic measures. The legitimization of neo-liberal globalization is accomplished with the consent of national governments which do not necessarily represent their people. Such legitimization is based on the false representation of governments as being sovereign over a people, who are taken as one homogenized mass. In truth governments often represent the interests of patriarchal elites. Indeed the various struggles of the world's masses against neo-liberal impositions have been met with the police power of governments. Here again, as in other fundamentalisms, there is a failure to take cognizance of the democratic and egalitarian impulses of a diverse society (Hardt and Negri 2002).

Indeed, theoreticians (Haraway 1991, Hardt and Negri 2000) point to the deeper integration of biological and political control exercised in late stage capitalism. The resurgence of fundamentalisms and its intrication in wars and conflicts that also mark late-stage global capitalism is further proof of the cogency of such an analysis. Fundamentalisms are also better explained by theories that understand the biopolitical nature of social control in late capitalism, theories that integrate desire into political economy.

Thus social movements against racism and imperialism which ignore the struggle against patriarchy or give it secondary importance jeopardize their own objectives.

Theoretical Challenges

The near universality of the patriarchal control of women as a feature of fundamentalisms deserves a deep analysis. Even those who recognize this commonality argue that fundamentalisms are best understood if analysis is done at the level of the concrete and contextual (Benboune 2007). Thus, the consistent patriarchal character of religious and other fundamentalisms must be balanced with the need for contextual analysis. At the level of theory, this repositions problematiqués for feminist postmodernism (Afar 1999) and identity politics (Pragna 2004).

Religious fundamentalisms can only be explained by an analysis that does not take the productive economy and the state as the primary or consistently determinative sources of political power. Such reductionist views cannot explain how fundamentalisms adapt to a plethora of micro and macro

situations and use power sources inside and outside the state to affect people's lives. On the other hand, a completely relativist view of power that understands only its capillary and nomadic aspects cannot explain the consistency by which fundamentalisms uphold social systems of oppression such as patriarchy and neo-liberal globalization.

As has been previously noted struggles around national, racial, tribal and religious identity mark fundamentalist projects. Here again theories that accept that identities are socially constructed, multiple and fluid need to be contextualized by parameters that uphold the moral ascendancy of human rights and global well-being. As Pragna (2004) notes, the problem with religious fundamentalism is that women are coerced into affirming their identity as members of certain communities (racial or religious) to the detriment of their identity as women. It must be recognized that women desire to be identified with a certain family, tribe, religion, community, culture or nation. But large numbers of women suffer when they are made to give up their rights and other identities as a condition for remaining in a group. For example, women are made to feel like traitors when they seek changes in the patriarchal concepts and practices in their religious traditions. Similarly women in minority communities may be labeled as traitors when they struggle against the violence and oppression they experience within those communities. The problem is further complicated when national laws and international politics allow exceptions to human rights standards under the guise of multiculturalism or respect for national sovereignty. Both within nations and between nations, practices such as enforced marriage, genital mutilation, stoning for sexual misconduct are often tolerated under the guise of religious tolerance (Cohen 2006).

The fallacy in these interpretations is that, despite women's desire to identify themselves with certain communities, people within these communities have different interpretations as to what this identification means. To fail to recognize the egalitarian and democratic struggles being waged within identity reinforces the fascism and intolerance of fundamentalist projects. As Wee (2006) and Sahgal (2006) point out, religion does not automatically mean traditional values or the lack of tolerance and democracy in the interpretation of doctrine. There are religious groups which are democratic and non-patriarchal. Furthermore, women in all religions are waging battles to reinterpret doctrine towards gender equality.

Fascism and intolerance which are also hallmarks of fundamentalisms

(Helie-Lucas 2004) are phenomena which have been the subject of study of social psychology since the 20th century. Wee (2006) notes that like other fundamentalisms, fascism seeks to control women:

Here, the cult of machismo as statecraft leads to organized male violence, which is valorized as the highest expression of citizenship. Women are domesticated and seen primarily as biological and social reproducers of leaders and soldiers (1).

In his attempt to posit all desire as primordially social rather than individual, Guattari (1972 cited in Bogue 1989) postulates a theory of collectivity and subjectivity that explains the persistence of fascism. His theory is of interest to feminists because of his attempt to integrate desire into political theory. Of particular relevance to the issue of fundamentalisms, his theory of groups may guide feminists and other social movement actors through the tricky waters of liberational identity politics and fascist identity politics.

Guattari makes a distinction between the subjected group and the group subject. While the subjected group defines itself as a reaction to other groups and is therefore determined by these others, the group subject seeks to define its own internal dynamics as it interacts with other groups. The subjected group enforces traditional concepts, roles and power structures and struggles against reformulations of desire. Such a group forms fantasies around a permanent object such as an eternal God, thus granting itself a sense of immortality. The group subject on the other hand opens itself to redefinitions and new modes of interaction. The group subject still forms fantasies but around transient objects that are transcended by actions that open up new boundaries, new fantasies and therefore new definitions of desire and identity.

Guattari extends this analysis by pointing out that group phenomena such as racism, regionalism and nationalism are examples of subjected group processes. Furthermore he sees the capitalist state as a repressive mechanism that prevents the emergence of group subject processes that threaten capitalism.

On the other hand, Guattari's analysis of subject processes validates the advocacy by feminists that women must be allowed to assert the multiplicity of their identities and their right to seek changes in the norms that define those identities in order to fight fundamentalisms (Pragna 2004). The political deployment of fluid and open identity constructions is not merely one that

protects against violations and abuse; it is also a long term strategy for achieving the goals of a revitalized globalized social movement (Estrada-Claudio 2007).

The discussion in this paper of theories that link reproduction and desire with capitalism is by no means exhaustive. The discussion is merely meant to show that the classification of globalization as an “economic fundamentalism” is conceptually sound.

Empirical Evidence for Secular Values

Empirical evidence can be found to support the argument for an integrated struggle against all forms of fundamentalisms and intolerance as an important factor in human development across countries. The World Values Survey in its website describes itself as “the world’s most comprehensive investigation of political and socio-cultural change.” Beginning in 1981 with 22 countries, the survey has been repeated to include more and more countries to complete a series of 4 “waves”. The last wave conducted in 2005, covers 62 countries. It has thus become an important indicator of socio-cultural changes over time and across cultures.

Using the survey data, Wezel (2006) notes that despite wide variations in people’s orientations, these can be reduced to just two basic dimensions: weak vs. strong secular-rational values and weak vs. strong self-expression values. Secular-rational values would include: less emphasis on religion and national pride, more emphasis on independent thinking rather than respect for authorities and the acceptance of divorce (as a marker for less emphasis on “familism”). Self expression values include liberty aspirations (that is the enjoyment of civil and political rights), the acceptance of homosexuality (as a marker for tolerance of non-conformity), a strong sense of self direction, participation in petition signing (used as a marker for the public expression of sentiments) and the ability to trust others. Wezel argues that where self expression and secular-rational values are strong, there is a move towards choice. When the two dimensions are weak, there is a move towards constraint. Wezel concludes that moving from constraint to choice is necessary to human development because it makes people mentally free and allows them to develop their potentials. At a social level Wezel also notes that the move towards choice generates a potential for democratic reform. Wezel’s data also charts countries along the two dimensions, revealing a trend towards choice and democracy in countries which achieve higher levels of economic well being.

It should also be noted that Wezel’s interpretation is relevant to the debate

about the balancing of individual against collective rights. Fundamentalists have often sacrificed the individual rights of women by juxtaposing this against the greater good of the community of believers, the tribe, the race or the nation. This is tied up with the idea that individual rights and choice is a Western imposition that is unnatural to non-Western societies. The data show that the move towards choice and secularism is occurring across all cultures. It also shows that the contradiction between collective well-being and individual choice is a spurious one.

Smaller studies indicate similar trends. Gregory (2005) examines religious beliefs in 18 developed democracies and the correlation to social health and dysfunction. He found that higher rates of belief in and worship of a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult mortality, STD infection rates, teen pregnancy, and abortion in the prosperous democracies. Gregory notes a historical trend towards the lessening of social ills such as homicide as societies have become less religious. Citing the United States as a consistent outlier in the trend towards more scientific and secular attitudes, he notes that ill health and social dysfunction remains highest in the US of all the developed countries studied.

Jensen (2006) calls for a refinement of Gregory's analysis by being more specific about the variables studied to indicate social dysfunction and the nuancing of religious beliefs. He also extends the analysis to more countries than Gregory's study by using the data in the World Values Survey. Nonetheless this study also finds that collective beliefs in a more benevolent religious cosmos (defined as belief in God and heaven but not the devil and hell) are positively correlated to lower homicide rates. The Philippines, South Africa and the Dominican Republic are classified along with the US as countries where a more malevolent cosmology is accepted, because beliefs in the devil and hell are embraced alongside beliefs in God and heaven. These countries exhibit higher homicide rates.

Redefining Secularism

Secularism despite its broad acceptance as a value among feminists is also a term that needs to be unpacked in order for it to be politically useful. Wee (2006) notes that secularism does not necessarily mean modernity, equal rights or individualism. Wee uses an example of Confucianism, a secular philosophy that justifies patriarchy as the best form of statecraft. Another example of a modern patriarchal secular philosophy is fascism.

Again these views are not legitimated by reference to any superhuman power (i.e., God, gods or divine law). Examples of fascist states are Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, both of which operated as secular states. The Neo-Fascists of contemporary Europe have also inherited this secular orientation (pp. 1-2).

On the other hand, Wee (2006) also points out that even avowed liberal democracies, states may vary in their commitment to gender equality.

More importantly Wee states:

We face capitalist patriarchies, fundamentalist patriarchies, neo-fascist patriarchies - all founded on hierarchies of winners and losers, all with ambitions of expanding their political space. Women are collectively losers in these hierarchies. In fact, these hierarchies are based on women being losers who would 'service' the winners. There can be no gender equality if the very idea of equality is lost as a desired value (3).

The term secularism has also come to denote a variety of concepts and social practices. From its roots in European history the term has come to mean the separation of the sacred from the temporal, a distinction made within Christian theology. It has also come to mean the privatization of church lands and the freeing of political life and later economic policy and art from church dogma. From these beginnings secularism has also denoted separation of church and state, a decline of religion and the pre-eminence of the rationality. But self-identified secular states practice separation differently. In Mexico for example, priests are not allowed to vote (an-Na'im 2006). In countries like the Philippines however, the Catholic Church practically dictates policy especially around reproductive and sexual rights.

Differences in the way secularism is practiced show that moral and cultural considerations affect public policy. Feminists attempt to affect public policy just as much as other sectors when we fight for the implementation of women's rights or seek state actions to promote equality. Human rights, gender equality, social justice, environmentalism are also moral values. Additionally, many people fighting for human rights, gender equality and social justice do so out of the conviction that it is the correct way of living their religious beliefs. Various strains of feminist philosophy and political theory are also critical of privileging the empirical and the rational without balancing these with the emotional and the intimate.

Nonetheless we need to posit secularism as a tool against fundamentalisms in a way that supports the democratic aspirations that caused the separation of Church and state in Europe. In this light an-Na'im (2006) proposes the concept of secularism as mediation. Citizens must be able to propose and advocate policy and legislative initiatives on the basis of their religious belief. But such proposals must be within the context of reasoning that is acceptable to those who do not accept the particular belief system of the proponents. As a corollary, public policy must also be crafted and implemented in such a way that allows all citizens to accept, amend or reject the policy as a matter of individual conscience. Finally such policy must conform to accepted human rights standards including standards of non-discrimination and protection of the minority against the tyranny of the majority.

While an-Naim comes to her view of secularism from within Islamic traditions, Vaggione (2002) approaches the concept from within his experiences as a gay-lesbian rights scholar and activist working in Catholic Latin America. Vaggione notes that the Catholic Church in Latin America straddles both the theological and the secular when it opposes reproductive and sexual rights. The ability of the Church to straddle the secular and the private occurs because societies have not become secularized and religion remains strong as a matter of private choice. Vaggione notes for example that the Church uses secular (quasi) scientific arguments when it states that condoms do not protect against HIV-AIDs transmission. This is in addition to its arguments that condoms are sinful because they prevent procreation which the Church posits as the single moral basis for sexual intercourse. Vaggione proposes that this dual nature of the Catholic Church's discourse must be addressed effectively if it is to be counteracted. His proposal is that activists cannot ignore engaging in both areas. First, final interpretation of doctrine cannot be left to the Catholic hierarchy that has become fundamentalist. Secondly, the Church must be criticized when it moves in secular spaces by counteracting its junk scientific arguments. These two polarities must also be bridged because the Church has to be made morally liable for its misuse of scientific arguments. Conversely, there is a need to push democratic discussion to counteract the Church's hierarchy's unilateralism in the conduct of theological interpretation. Vaggione thus proposes the concept of "religious dissidence" as another arena that complements the call for secularism.

French Muslim scholar Beincheke reinforces Vaggione's argument from the viewpoint of the religious person. He argues that secular separation is in

fact good for religion. He argues that secularization returns all religions to its original state which is that of belief adopted out of pure conviction uninfluenced by fear or force. In this way belief professed out of cultural compliance or for gain is minimized. He notes that the “community of believers” envisioned in Islam cannot be translated into anything that resembles state imposed religion. Reiterating the theme that there is a need nonetheless for religions of all kinds to lend their wisdom to society, Beincheck calls for the free interaction of moral and ethical arguments in the public sphere. This benefits religion as well because religion is renewed when it confronts social realities and reinterprets doctrine towards social relevance in democratic dialogue.

Conclusion

In summary this paper presents several major points. First, it defines religious fundamentalisms. Religious fundamentalisms fall within a larger phenomenon of fundamentalisms. Despite claims to tradition, fundamentalisms are further defined as modern political projects. Because they are political projects religious fundamentalist groupings make alliances across religions and with other groups that promote bigotry, intolerance and fascism.

Fundamentalist groups have shown adaptability and diversity and work at local, national and international levels. Religious fundamentalist groups can be small disempowered minority groups, small groups that use military arms and violence or they can be well-funded transnational networks. Despite the diversity, they have a common agenda around the control of women and in particular women’s bodies and sexuality. A related feature is that fundamentalisms attempt to construct group identities and women are used as markers for such identities. Because of this fundamentalisms are one of the major threats to women’s rights and empowerment.

Fundamentalisms are modern projects because they are reactions to global political and economic realities. In particular, the current resurgence relates to the insecurity and mass poverty brought about by the excesses of the global capitalist economy. Some of the goals of fundamentalists are overtly capitalist such as the support by Christian fundamentalists in the United States for the economic and foreign policies of George W. Bush. Other groups may not be capitalist in intent but nonetheless strengthen economic inequities because they ascribe oppression to the wrong causes resulting in political scapegoating of people who are also victims. Yet other fundamentalist groups that may seem anti-capitalist reiterate the gender oppression that is the bedrock

upon which the current global economy flourishes.

In this light, late stage neo-liberal globalization may be viewed as a form of fundamentalism. Like other fundamentalist projects it presents a single orthodox view of economic doctrine; is averse to a plurality of interpretations; does not recognize the diversity of human situations and needs and; uses fascist power to implement its prescriptions. It is also based on assumptions about women and women's sexuality that reiterates the views of other forms of fundamentalisms.

All forms of fundamentalisms (religious, tribal, economic) are essentially anti-democratic in character. As such they are also threats to the universal application of human rights principles and the broader political project of global well being.

Second, this paper discusses certain theoretical challenges posed by fundamentalisms. The phenomenon of fundamentalisms urges an analytical frame that insists on investigating the concrete and the contextual without sacrificing the recognition of systematic oppressions such as those related to class, race and gender. Fundamentalism challenges the validity of theories of power that recognizes only power that arises from the productive economy and state apparatus. It calls on a more nuanced analysis that accepts that power can come from various sources and that cultural and other non-state actors and institutions can sometimes be the main purveyors of exploitation and oppression. Fundamentalisms also point to the fact that individual and group identity are constructed within social and political conditions and are not stable, pre-given entities.

Third, this paper explores feminist responses. Feminists' resistances to fundamentalisms must stem from an understanding of the phenomenon and the practical and theoretical challenges it poses.

There is a need at this time for a thoroughgoing defense of women's human rights in the light of the fundamentalist resurgence. The assertion of the universality of human rights as the bedrock for social policy is urgent. There is also a need to insist on a comprehensive application of human rights that resists the contraposing of individual freedoms and collective well-being.

Women must also use their power to assert all aspects of their identity--religious, tribal, national and sexual. They must be able to define for

themselves what membership to any group means. They cannot be constrained to accept membership in any group or to prioritize one set of identity positions over others. They must also be given the freedom to cease being identified with any group if they choose. In terms of political movements, there is a need to carefully deploy identity politics so that it achieves actually chosen political ends.

Secularism must be redefined so that it upholds the principle of over-all equality -- including gender equality. It must also include a definition of democracy that allows for the discussion of moral values in the formation of public policy within the parameters of upholding the universality of human rights, anti-discrimination and the protection of the rights of the minority. This public space for discussion while recognizing moral values cannot privilege one religion nor must it ignore the fact that many moral values are not based on religious faith. The call for secularism however, must include a call to create democratic spaces within the various religious traditions. Women need democracy in public spaces, in the private arena of religion and in the intimacy of their desires and consciences if they are to achieve equality.

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