



UP Centennial Lecture: Thematic Series

“Women Contesting Fundamentalisms
and Other Forms of Intolerance”

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11 March 2008

UP-NISMED Auditorium

University of the Philippines

Diliman, Quezon City

Companion Information Material

INTERSECTIONS

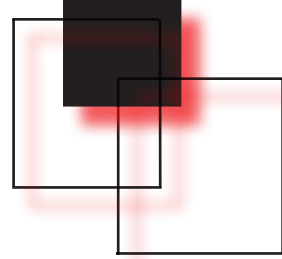
Fundamentalisms

Women's Issues

Intolerance

By Odine de Guzman

This information packet maps out the general intersections of women's issues, human rights, and fundamentalisms and other forms of intolerance.



The resurgence of fundamentalisms is an important, critical issue that needs to be addressed politically, economically, socially, and culturally precisely because they affect communities, especially women, in all these spheres of life. Crucial events in the 21st century such as the 2001 bombing of the Twin Towers in New York, USA and the subsequent retaliation of the US, even against nation-states not directly linked to the attack, have exponentially fueled fundamentalist thought on both sides of the Atlantic. All these have reinvigorated the need of some groups to delineate and defend what are claimed to be “us” and “ours” against those that are declared to be “them” and “theirs”.

Fundamentalists work to protect what they consider “theirs”, propagate their ideas as immutable truths, and work to impose these ideas upon others. Most of the time, these actions undermine and encroach on the human rights of their target groups.

Defining fundamentalism

Fundamentalism in its basic sense is a belief in the infallibility of the Word, i.e., the Scriptures both as basis of faith and practice, and as historical record. The term developed from the ideas of Presbyterian theologians in the US around the 1920s. This belief later evolved into a movement that opposed the burgeoning theological modernism within the wider Christian community. It advocated instead a strict obedience to the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith, for example, the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the second coming (WAF 1994).

Since its origins in the early 20th century, the term has developed several connotations: extremism, intransigence, inflexibility, and religious fanaticism. Its usage also widened to refer to a strict adherence to a belief or principle other than religious such as an economic principle – neo-liberalism. While the usage is not straightforward, the term has become a marker of “Otherness”.

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the term “fundamentalism” became synonymous with Islam and Muslims, and with non-western terror groups. It is now sometimes used in place of racist tirades.

Today, fundamentalisms come in different guises and combinations, depending on their historical and cultural specificity: political, economic, cultural, political-religious. The most frequently recognized form, however, still wears religious garb even though the assertion of fundamentalist thought and practice is not wholly about religion but more about power and social control. Religion is one of the more familiar means by which fundamentalists secure power; it is also very authoritative, having both natural and divine force.

Fundamentalists also secure power by means of culture, race, and ethnicity.

In its more contemporary usage, fundamentalism is less used to refer to a religious practice than to “a modern political movement, which uses religion as basis for consolidating power and extending social control” (WAF 1994). Such a manifestation is understood as political-religious—where religion is not only used for political purposes but politicized as well (Mohideen 2007).

Although common by association, fundamentalism is not unique to Islam. There are Hindu, Judaist, Catholic, Christian fundamentalisms. All of these examples have a patriarchal nature and

misogynist outlook. Fundamentalisms thus directly imperil women.

Tracing intersections: fundamentalisms, women's issues, and human rights

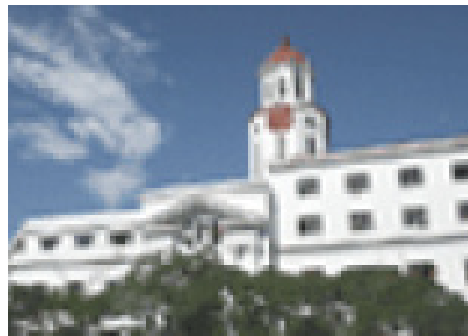
The control of women is crucial to fundamentalist politics that are informed by ideas of identity, and cultural and religious values. Fundamentalist groups go to great lengths to keep women within the patriarchal home because women, as bearers of children, are believed to be repositories and transmitters of culture and purity of blood. Women are tasked to devote their lives to taking care of men and to bearing and rearing children toward the continuity of the ethnic line. But while women hold this important reproductive role, they are not highly valued; in fact, they are jealously guarded just to secure the purity of the male line. This is seen in some communities in the veiling of women, the practice of clitoridectomy, the practice of widow burning, and the control of women's reproductive capacity by prescribing the ways to plan their reproductive health.

The control of women's bodies can be overt or covert. Examples of overt ways are the imposition of the burqas and separate development for women as expressed in public policy on education – women only attend religious schools – such as in the Afghanistan of the Talibans; the public stoning of women as punishment for adultery in Shari'a states; and the particulars of divorce law that prescribes that a woman must observe the iddah, a four-month period before remarriage to ensure she was not pregnant from her previous marriage – this guarantees her children are rightfully her next husband's – to name a few.

Covert forms of control are harder to pin down. One such example is the indistinguishable relationship between the Philippine government and the Philippine Catholic Church

in which public policy on women's reproductive health is influenced by the beliefs of the Church, although the two are constitutionally separate.

Another example is Executive Order 003 of the City of Manila issued in 2000 by then mayor Jose Atienza. This EO declares: "the City promotes responsible parenthood and upholds natural family planning not just as a method but as a way of self-awareness in promoting the culture of life while discouraging the use of artificial methods of contraception like condoms, pills, intrauterine devices, surgical sterilization, and others." The critical issue with this EO is that while it does not ban "artificial" contraception, its implementation had the effect of sweeping up city health centers and hospitals of all supplies and services deemed to



be "artificial" forms, and in the process, denying the City's poor women and their families access to these supplies that are only normally affordable to them through the public health centers. In practice, the everyday (mis)interpretation of the EO by city health workers has effectively prevented the distribution of contraceptives and dissemination of information on other family planning methods in the City. The ideological reach of the EO is long that it affects nearby city health centers and service facilities in its fundamentalist claim of moral uprightness: a city official interviewed declared, "In Manila, we are pro-life. We take care of our women" (Likhaan 2007, 20). Other consequences of the executive order are the shutting down even of privately-run family planning service facilities; the halting of medical missions that offer artificial methods of family planning, and; the harassment of health workers in these centers, who were called abortionists (Jimeno quoted in Likhaan 2007).

Body politics works on two levels: the physiological –as illustrated in the examples above – and the psychological. Fundamentalist discourse affects the psyche concretely as it controls and limits the embodied self.

In this discourse, a woman is usually reduced to her body; her worth depends on her bodily functions. Jose Atienza, author of Manila City's EO 003, revealed a rather unsettling idea in his account of his own family planning practice. Accordingly, he and his wife have six children; the five "came in quick succession," while "the sixth came years later. He says that was because his wife 'took the pill without my knowledge and I tell you, she became a devil, a demon,' blaming what he thinks was hormonal imbalance brought on by the pill." (Jimeno 2005) Whether or not this was said in jest, language constructs reality.

Related are the material effects of conservative and intolerant views on sexuality; in this discursive field, there is only one form of sexuality: heterosexual and masculine. As a result, gays and lesbians in many parts of the world suffer persecution and violence because of what they are (Amnesty International 2001).

Fundamentalist thought and intolerance shape reality. They also put a limit on the space in which women can move and live freely.

The resurgence of fundamentalisms in different hues can thus squander the hard-won rights of women. The rescinding of women's rights does not only happen in places that have been stereotyped as fundamentalist. It can also happen through ways that seem innocuous so that we tend to overlook them. Safeguarding women's rights requires continuous vigilance even now on the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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**United Nations treaties most relevant to issues of
fundamentalisms and women's human rights**

- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination Against Women
- Convention Against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960)

**UN Declarations relevant to protecting and promoting human rights in contexts of
rising fundamentalisms**

Gender-based discrimination

- UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
- United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- Crimes of Honor (UN Resolution 2004)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)

Political and civil rights

- Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1999)

Rights of minorities and racism

- Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (UNESCO, 1978)
- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963)
- Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals Who are not Nationals of the Country in which They Live (General Assembly, 1985)

Freedom of thought and religion

- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981)
- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992)

General

- Human Rights Committee General Comment 22 on Article 18 (for ICCPR States Party reports on Freedom of Religion or Belief, paragraph 11 General Comment)
- Human Rights Committee General Comment 28 on Article 3 (ICCPR States Party reports, goes beyond the original article in light of threats to women's health, female infanticide, immolation of widows, dowry deaths, genital mutilations, forced prostitution, etc.)
- Human Rights Committee General Comment 19 on Article 23 (for ICCPR States Party reports, requires the consent of both marriage partners, advocates civil registration of religious marriages to prevent abuses, child marriage, polygamy where proscribed, etc.)
- Convention on the Rights of Child
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The UP Centennial Lecture Series is a vital component of the celebration of UP's 100th year of academic excellence and service to the nation. Spearheaded by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the lecture series feature talks by distinguished scholars, academicians and personalities from various fields. The lectures are beamed to all the campuses via webcast and can be viewed thru the web address <http://dilc.upd.edu.ph/streaming/>.

This lecture is set up with the organizational support of the UP Center for Women's Studies.

Plenary Speakers



Carolyn I. Sobritchea, Ph.D.

Carolyn I. Sobritchea is professor of Philippine Studies at the Asian Center in UP Diliman. She served as director of the UP Center for Women's Studies from 2000-2007.

An internationally recognized gender expert on the Philippines, she has written extensively on reproductive health and development, migration and HIV/AIDS, women's human rights, and gender and microfinance. She has developed numerous training manuals and programs on gender mainstreaming, planning and monitoring for local government units, government agencies, and public and private schools across the country. Carolyn has served as resource person in several United Nations committee meetings on women.

She is convener of this UP Centennial lecture on women.



Reihana Mohideen

Born in Sri Lanka and now residing in the Philippines, Reihana Mohideen is a long-term feminist activist for women's rights. She cut her political teeth in the women's movement in Australia at the University of Melbourne and was introduced to the marvels and turmoil of progressive politics through her involvement in the feminist movement.

She has worked as a gender specialist in Timor-Leste, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Afghanistan, the UK and Australia for several international development agencies including Oxfam and the UNDP. Her work in Pakistan and Afghanistan brought her in contact with the day to day struggles of Muslim women against religious fundamentalism.

She is on the board of several feminist and social justice journals and publications, including Links Magazine and Green Left Weekly. She writes on feminist politics and theories in the Philippines and overseas.



Sylvia Estrada-Claudio, M.D., Ph.D.

Sylvia Estrada-Claudio is a doctor of medicine who also holds a Ph.D. in Psychology. She is the current director of the UP Center for Women's Studies and is an associate professor at the Department of Women and Development Studies, UP Diliman College of Social Work and Community Development. Sylvia is co-founder and chair of the board of directors of Likhaan, an organization working with grassroots women on issues of reproductive and sexual health and rights. She is also co-chair of the board of the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights.

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