

Inch'Allah l'ÉGALITÉ!

collectif **féministes** pour
l'égalité

The Collectif des féministes pour l'égalité Charter

Initially published in May 2005

The Collectif des féministes pour l'égalité (CFPE, i.e. "The Collective of Feminists for Equality") was founded in 2004 by a group of feminists who chose to voice their opposition to the hijab ban in French public schools. We consider our cultural diversity to be an asset, and we take part in the women's global movement.

Our objectives:

To fight discrimination against women and struggle for equal rights.

To refuse the idea of only one pattern of women's liberation and emancipation.

To respect women's freedom of choice: we have the right to choose the way we dress, including wearing a hijab or not.

To oppose exclusion laws that stigmatise women, treating us as second-class, undesirable or lower-caste citizens on the basis of our social, cultural, religious or political affiliation.

To fight restrictive interpretations of freedom. To develop alternative viewpoints and examine the fundamental concepts

of our societies in the light of women's struggles.

To fight political and media instrumentalization of women's causes.

To broaden the reflexion and analysis on the mechanisms of discrimination in all areas, so we can create effective means of struggling.

To promote education for and by women.

To struggle for women's emancipation, respecting our choices (political, social, religious, sexual etc.), and denounce any use of force, be it political, religious, intellectual or sexist, that may deny us our rights.

To foster women's speaking out in public life and debates, and enable us to share our ideas and experience at a community level.

To assert and construct joint reflexions, as well as exchanges and solidarity with women worldwide.

To encourage the transversality of people and ideas from different political, social, geographical and age perspectives.



World March of Women

2010, third International action.

Women on the March until we are all free !

Already present in 2005, our Collectif will participate to the european mobilisation in Istanbul—Turkey on 30th June



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Women, let us refuse to be the hostages of the "war of civilisations"!

By Monique Crinon and Karine Gantin

Translated by Aleksandra Peeroo
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Women in resistance

The paradigm of the war of civilisations has gained in autonomy these last years: it fills the political speeches and practices in many regions of the world, in the North as in the South, transforms human and social relations, changes the direction of the international relations on all levels.

In this eminently symbolic war, the woman's body, her free will, and her struggles are taken hostage. As a matter of fact, this situation of a new war, real and imaginary at the same time, leads to the resurgence of virile values that are reduced to their most martial, aggressive and destructive conception: sometimes, in the cause of the combat against the imperialistic and colonialistic West, women are confined in a conservative interpretation of religious traditions; or, in the cause of a formal interpretation of universalistic values such as the equality of sexes and women's rights, a war with imperialistic accents, be it latently or actively, is declared against social groups, nations and peoples, against their culture and against their right to think, to become emancipated, to invent... In a nutshell, everywhere and in all social classes, women tend once again to be reduced to an object conceived by others, defined in an authoritarian way by the dominant groups according to their battle, instrumentalised, not to say ridiculed by them: rape in the context of war, accentuated normalisation of the affective and social life of women, ideological diversion of their histories and combats, aggravated suspicion concerning an autonomous feminist research, refusal of the diversity of female emancipating trajectories apart from admitted paths... Every day, the creation of a state of war in the world in the name of a civilisation supposed to liberate the "barbarians" makes the life of those women a little bit more difficult who also and still have to suffer the patriarchal oppression, the weight of liberalism and the resultant

misery, but also the effects of this war which does not tell its name but which refers to these women as potential enemies of the so-called emancipated ones.

This ideological confrontation hinders the dialogue between feminists, spoils the convergence of women's battles, profoundly divides the feminist movement and weakens it dangerously while the rights, words and freedom of half of the humanity are manhandled and call for collective mobilisations. Obviously, it is in particular religious issues, "the veil business" or the claim of women to independent thoughts on spiritualities or intercultural relations that pervade as many fractures the different militant fields. Today, the question is how to resume the debate that has been pending due to these transformations and recent divisions while basing it on an analysis of the urgencies and actual struggles of women. In which terms can we put the necessity of new convergent feminist struggles despite our diversities? Using what slogans? Are we still capable of having a common framework amongst militants, beyond old or recent disagreements? And how to subtract the female battles from the paradigm of the war of civilisations? How to denounce this paradigm in the name of an "other possible world"... by taking explicitly support from the women's battles?

How to articulate feminism compared to other social and political emancipating battles and how to situate it within the worldwide movement that criticises globalisation? The stake is to deconstruct the actual situation of "creating" a capitalist, nationalist, ethnic, religious or cultural "war" in order to make a contribution to unearth a common space for the construction of global alternatives, while avoiding – together – two pitfalls: the absolute cultural relativism and an "abstract" and dominating universalism.

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About March 8th

By Marie-Laure Bousquet

Translated by the author

Initially published in June 2010

March 8th was initiated a hundred years ago by activists of the *Internationale Socialiste* (1). This year it is celebrated along with the 40th anniversary of the women's liberation movement in France, at the same moment as the regional elections. With these two anniversaries, what is left of feminism and its teachings, and about how to think and put into practise the expression "The per-

sonal is political"? I am referring to the massive and negative reactions provoked, among the feminist groups and political parties from the right and the left, by the candidature on the lists of the Anti-Capitalist New Party of a "veiled, feminist and secular" Muslim woman, as she defines herself. Her candidature was violently rejected in the name of feminism, of the "values" of secularity, equality and freedom of our Republic. Would the March 8th 2010 feminism betray its engagements of the seventies, or rather, would it demand today of some women, here *Muslim* women, to practise a separation which they refused for themselves, because it was considered the tool of an oppression?

I would like to say a few words here, as we celebrate these two anniversaries, about the question of the inter-connectedness between feminism and spirituality posed by Ilham Moussaïd as a candidate on the list of an anti-capitalist political party. She represents, I think, a new and upsetting symbol of contemporary and various feminisms, sometimes excluding but also meeting one another.

Feminism and spirituality : A culture of inter-connectedness

In a book entitled *Standing again at Sinai* (2), the author, Judith Plaskow, a feminist Jew/Jewish feminist, explains what follows: to accept the logic of opposing feminism and Judaism is to leave into others' hands the power to define both and to obey a sort of ultimatum where we would have to choose between various aspects of our identities. The point is to refuse this exclusive logic of an "either/or" identity, of an inner deadly, totalitarian and violent split, separation, segregation of the self.

To say, live, think the connection between feminism and spirituality is to say, live and think the tools of another logic, a logic of movement, of a process of mutual transformation of an union without confusion since spirituality derives from spirit, a breath where static oppositions and hierarchical complementarities are changed into horizontal polarities irrigated by an elusive, unseizable breathing beyond any kind of representation. All the struggles of Jewish, Christian and Muslim feminist women express this paradigm shift in the realm of traditional and patriarchal knowledge which has never stopped, all along the centuries, keeping under control this creative spirit, turning it into a masculinism: the ONE GOD represented as masculine in the terrestrial spiritual powers.

Whether in text re-interpretations, religious leadership or God-language, family

and social relationships, the common thread of these struggles is the experience of an alternative inner vision of God, of a breathing no more "enrolled" into hierarchical differences but lived as the garment of a dynamical reciprocity. The culture of inter-connectedness lying within the framework of feminism and spirituality breaks with the masculine monopolisation of God. Its intention is not to change it into a feminine monopoly, but to strive to "conceive", in its double meaning of conceiving concepts and children, the inclusive logic of an alternative world view. To conceive and give birth to the theory/practise of an inclusive monotheism of power *with* and not power *over*, is to create the "wedding tools" as René Char(3) says so beautifully, of a slow, conflicting and sometimes painful shift of the superior/inferior paradigm not only between men and women but also between women themselves, or between the "politically correct progressive thinking of enlightened secular activists and feminists on one side and obscurantists on the other". I quote here from an article published in *Le Monde*(4) in February 2010, entitled "For a different policy". It was signed by Isabelle STENGERS and Philippe PIGNARRE who precisely talked about the reactions to Ilham Moussaïd's candidature which I mentioned above.

Many women around the world are participating actively in this conceptual and practical revolution at its different levels of reality, whether spiritual, politico-economical, social and personal. On this 8th of March 2010 sullied by the debates on "national identity" which are a "good" example of the binary thinking unable to conceptualize a culture of interconnectedness, I am happy to think about this international feminine/feminist movement without borders. It is analysed in a book called *Par-delà le féminisme*(5), published in 2004.

I would like to conclude with Mahmoud Darwich who says: «I refuse to feel defeated and I cling to the mad hope that life, history, justice still have meaning. I have chosen to be hope-sick".

- 1) International workers' organization.
- 2) Plaskow Judith, *Standing again at Sinai. Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*, New York, HarperOne, 1991.
- 3) French poet (1907-1988) who also participated in the Résistance against Nazi occupation of France from 1944 to 1945.
- 4) French left-wing daily newspaper.
- 5) Sizoo Édith, *Par-delà le féminisme*, Paris, Editions Charles-Léopold Mayer, 2004. (Beyond feminism. Not translated)

A call for dialogue with an angry woman... By Marie-Laure Bousquet, Ismahane Chouder, Monique Crinon, Catherine Samary

Translated by Ijtihad Lefebvre

Initially published in June 2010

To Wassyla Tamzali. An answer to the article published in *Solidarités* about *An angry woman. A letter from Algiers to disillusioned Europeans* by Wassyla Tamzali

We do not include ourselves in the « disillusioned Europeans » Wassyla Tamzali sends her *Letter from Algiers* to, and this is the reason we are seeking dialogue with her. But we regret and object her errors in judgement and confusions or shifts in thought that result in binary and pitfall views. We offer to try to find and defend together a way towards efficient universalist dynamics that would stem from all emancipation struggles with their multiple aspects.

We share your anger, Wassyla, against all those, men and women, who oppose freedom of conscience while pretending they are serving noble causes. We reject, just as you do, cultural relativism which, in the name of the struggle against (neo)colonial attitudes, impose on women to submit to so-called traditional violent cultural systems and other domination relationships. We are appalled by the hypocrisy of our governments and all those who, in order not to look Islamophobic, select “moderate islamists” who get promoted “according to their merit” through political clientelism or, even worse, back up dictatorships in the Muslim world as long as they are oil-rich and willing to play the political games of great powers...

We are angry against those who make the revolts and struggles of the youth from working-class suburbs or those of peoples from the South, including Palestine, into wars of religions, instead of pointing out their social and political dimensions. And above all – and precisely because we are women and staunch feminists – we are angry at feminists who forget about basic solidarity towards women victims of all discriminations and who confine certain categories of women, i.e. *Muslim* women, to a world apart where criteria common to all emancipating fights (including autonomy of choice) do not apply...

Unfortunately, each and every of these reasons for anger, that we apparently share, turns into a disagreement with you, Wassyla, for the framework you use to analyse what is happening in the French context make you blind about what is at stake and make you lose consistency in criteria.

The reason for that is quite simple: wearing a veil is never and nowhere univocal, never independent from the person who wears it, or from the context she wears it. And many feminist revolutions and struggles go on today “under the veil” or with no

veils, in the name of Islam, against dictatorships claiming their legitimacy from “shari’a”. Beyond that, Marjane Satrapi clearly expressed what is at stake in freedom of choice for women; she drew her revolt so beautifully about the Iranian revolution turning into a dictatorship that, among others, impose on women to wear the veil in Iran. Many are those who told the story of women who shifted attitudes – yesterday opposing the “Westernized” Shah and deciding to wear the veil – and opposing it being imposed today.

Whether we are of « Muslim background » as you are, or not, believers or atheists, we refuse relativist communal withdrawal that is unfortunately promoted by so-called “Salafi” tendencies, in France and elsewhere: our defending secularism does not require to be qualified as “open” or anything else. Nicolas Sarkozy appealed to an “open” secularism in order to instrumentalize imams so they would bring “order” back in suburbs, thus avoiding to designate his social policy and racism as the causes for the revolts.

Our conception of secularism aims at Islam being treated according to standards set by French law in 1905 for one thing; and, above all, counts on public school to overcome communalisms and to encourage critical thinking which is the source of all emancipation. Therefore you are misinterpreting. Secularism in France means the neutrality of state institutions regarding religious affairs, i.e. they are separate from any religious power, any Church, as a condition for freedom of conscience and diverse religious practices that State must protect...

The new law that was voted in 2004 does not apply these principles: users of public services are legally free, in France, to express their beliefs within the public and social space, provided that they do not breach the peace. Neutrality applies to civil servants and public buildings... And this is why, using their full conscience and freedom, many supporters of secularism questioned and objected to the legitimacy of the law of 2004 – including the Ligue de l’enseignement and the Ligue des droits de l’homme, as well as our Collectif des féministes pour l’égalité... It is necessary, as it is for every law, to draw an assessment of this law. It did not “liberate” Muslim women, nor did it even lower the number of headscarves: it polarised positions, meaning that more headscarves are to be worn, and that racism towards Muslims is violently directed at veiled women...

You cannot be insensitive to these phenomena, in the name of non-veiled women being attacked elsewhere by integrists. We must fight together against every type of violence, and against the patriarchal systems that give birth to it. And that veiled women fully participate in this fight at the heart of Islam is vital for the future... You say that this law – and there we must confess our amazement at your framework! – was voted without taking feminist issues into account. Quite the contrary happened during the media campaign surrounding this law, throughout Europe: the politicizing of the veil instrumentalized the causes of women... And you should be, just as we are or Judith Butler is, angry at all those who find themselves to be feminists (or defending homosexuals...) all of a sudden, when it comes to Islam.

Were it verified that every Muslim wanting to be true to her faith is bound to oppose freedom of conscience and equality between men and women, then we could share your viewpoint. But this viewpoint is pessimistic and simplistic: Islam, like every other religion, is both complex and crossed by contradictory trends in thinking. It is certainly shaped by the violence that was inflicted and by the fact that dominant trends chose to say the opposite of what seems to be “Western” (and therefore colonial): “feminism”, “democracy”, “secularism”, “freedom of conscience”, and that is why every critique of religions is rejected in the name of “Islam”... And yet, within the opposition to the present regime in Iran as everywhere in the Muslim and the “Western” world, this fake and pitfall dualism (“West” vs. “Islam”) is and must be opposed. Neither “the West” nor “Islam” cover homogenous worlds, “civilizations” with no major conflicts... resistances that carry individual and collective emancipations: these are the multiple ways we acknowledge and invoke towards universal values of emancipation, freedom and social justice.

Spillmann Anna and Urs, « Lettre d’Alger d’une femme en colère », in *Solidarités*, n. 161, 01/18/2010 : <http://solidarites.ch/journal/index.php3?action=4&id=4162&aut=689>. *Solidarités* is an “anticapitalistic, feminist and environmentalist movement promoting socialism for the 21st century”. Tamzali Wassyla, *Une femme en colère. Lettre d’Alger aux Européens désabusés*, Paris, Gallimard, 2009 (Not translated). See Adelhah Fariba, *La révolution sous le voile. Femmes islamiques d’Iran*, Paris, Karthala, 1991 (Revolution under the veil. Islamic women of Iran. Translated in Arabic and Spanish). See also

the One Million Signatures Campaign, which bring together atheist and believing women of Iran: www.we-change.org/english.

Göle Nilüfer, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997 (Originally published in Turkish, 1991. Also translated in French, German and Spanish).

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Hamas, Palestinian Women and Democracy

By Cecilia Baeza

Translated by Ijtihad Lefebvre

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A total wage freeze, a blockade on supplies (food, gasoline, medicine etc.), intra-Palestinian violence: this is the punishment Europe, the United States and Canada have inflicted on Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza for having democratically elected a government standing as an alternative to Fatah, which has been in power for thirteen years. Because they favoured Hamas over a party that is divided, prone to political clientelism, and ailing from the complete failure of peace negotiations with Israel, the Palestinian people is subjected to the worst economic and political conditions in its recent history. By cutting financial aid to the Palestinian Authority, Western states seem to be teaching a lesson to a bunch of colonized who were caught dreaming of democratic elections being about a people to sovereignly decide about its future.

The word “democracy” has definitely taken a coarse connotation since it has been pronounced by US diplomats in order to justify the military occupation of Iraq in its name. When an idea has been that corrupted by double-standard politics, we had really rather it to disappear from its undertakers’ vocabulary.

Women and Hamas

Among the arguments that helped shaping Hamas as a political monster in the eyes of the Westerners, women’s rights are often mentioned. Prim concern with Arabic Muslim women has indeed become an in vogue topic in our civilized elite salons. They are already fantasizing about Palestinian Territories being headed by a government imposing shari’a everywhere which, according to these same elites, would be synonymous with mandatory chador, polygamy, stoning, and legitimizing “honour killings”.

In order to oppose this ready-to-think

device, it is vital to deconstruct presuppositions:

1. The quite real deterioration in Palestinian women’s condition is not due to Hamas, but to the worsening of Israeli occupation since the beginning of the second Intifadha. Being the daily victims of the military occupation hardships (humiliation by the army, restriction on circulation etc.), and ill-protected by official structures that are weakened by six years of Intifadha as well, women are the first hit by the toughening in social relationships. While men are often unemployed and confined at home, intra-family tensions get sharper and most of the associations have witnessed a dramatic surge in domestic violence cases.

Beaten or raped, more and more Palestinian women suffer as a result from the violence of the Israeli state blast wave towards the Palestinian society. Rima Tarazi, a Christian and President of the General Union of Palestinian Women in Ramallah declares: “I’m not afraid of Hamas. Its members aren’t Taliban. [...] In the end, the racket that’s being done about this issue conceals the only true problem we have as Palestinians, which is the Israeli occupation. The risk presented by Hamas is negligible compared to our rights being violated by the Israeli army”.(1)

2. Fatah did not wait Hamas’ victory to introduce shari’a in Palestinian law: suffice it to review personal status issues (marriage, divorce, inheritance etc.). Strangely enough, nobody really ever felt outraged then. Anyway, it is not about standing “for or against” an Islamic law which supposedly is unfavourable to women no matter what time or space it is applied to: Palestinian feminists know it well and do not play on this binary categorization that is so dear to French so-called secularists. They campaign for the law to acknowledge gender equality, whatever its source of legitimization.

3. The vote – including this of women, i.e. half of the electorate – in favour of Hamas does not mean that obscurantism is rising in Palestine. Many observers have pointed out that this vote had no religious connotation, but was indeed expressing a radical challenge to a mortiferous status quo. Let us not forget that Palestinian society distinguishes itself in the region by its women’s education rate (they make up 50% of university students) and by a growing employment rate. Any backlash will only come from the blockade of universities and the paralysis of the public sector in which women have been strongly involved. And by preventing the Palestinian Authority to function correctly,

Western states take de facto their job away to many women. Teachers in public schools, nurses and doctors in hospitals, public servants in administration: Palestinian women not only had found there a space for autonomy, but often the one and only means to provide for their family as well.

While in this particular context, Caroline Fourest, Corinne Lepage and Pierre Cassen most inappropriately worry about “the progression of integrist Islam” in Palestine(2), it is urgent for feminists to rally and demand European aids to Palestinian Authority to resume unconditionally.

Inch’Allah equality !

(1)« Members of Hamas aren’t Taliban », La Croix (French Catholic daily newspaper), 01/25/2006.

(2)« Against a new obscurantism », Libération (French left-wing daily newspaper), 04/28/2006.

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