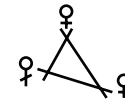


CSBR E-NEWS

Sexuality in Muslim Societies



WWHR- New Ways

THE INDONESIA PARLIAMENT PASSES THE MUCH CONTROVERSIAL ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY BILL

The much debated Anti-Pornography Bill in Indonesia was passed in the parliament on October 30, 2008, despite the fierce opposition of women's, human rights, and LGBTT groups, minorities, and artists, as well as over 100 parliamentarians from opposition parties walking out before the vote in protest. Even though the government has argued the content of the bill has been watered down, opposing groups view the bill as a major threat to women's rights and freedoms, LGBTT rights, cultural rights, as well as national unity and identity. The opponents argue the passing of the law was compromise to capture votes for the upcoming elections. There is no clear definition of pornography in the bill, which leaves room to criminalize sensuality, and any gesture or clothing suggesting nakedness, drawing strong protest from the predominantly Hindu island of Bali. Anyone caught displaying nudity can be punished with up to 10 years in prison. The law also legitimizes "moral policing" through allowing "civil society" to help prevent pornographic acts, which the opponents expect will be used to justify the violent actions of groups like the Islamic Defenders' Front. The bill also criminalizes homosexuality.

However, opponents are determined to continue their efforts against the law. According to Komnas Perempuan (The National Commission on Violence against Women) and Fathayat NU, the women's wing of one of the biggest mass based Islamic organizations, the campaign against the law has already succeeded to raise public awareness on the use of women's body in current Indonesian identity politics, women's groups have shown strong leadership by placing the discussion in the context of the direction of Indonesian democratization, and built strong alliances and coalitions with other social movements.



Native groups protesting the Anti-Pornography Bill

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A FIRST IN MALAYSIA: SEKSUALITI MERDEKA, SEXUAL RIGHTS FESTIVAL

While celebrating Malaysia's independence from Britain on the national Merdeka (Independence) Day, some Malaysians were making the case for the recognition of sexual rights and diversity with the 3 day sexual rights festival, *Seksualiti Merdeka*.

If one of us ain't free ...*

By Julian C.H. Lee, Monash University, Malaysia

In August last year, malaysiakini.com reported that a transsexual woman in Malacca had been brutally assaulted, allegedly by state religious officers, who also detained her because she was a man dressed as a woman, and that is an offence. Sexual identities and behaviours attract a great deal of attention in Malaysia, and those who are seen to fall outside heterosexual norms are the subject of official punishments as well as vigilantism. And yet, as a presenter at an unusual symposium held during the Merdeka weekend pointed out, alternative sexualities actually have a long history in this region. Through engaging tales of his travels in Indonesia and a retelling of the story of Panji (or Prince) Semarang, the crowd-pulling political scientist Dr Farish Noor made the point that non-heterosexual practices and relationships are far from being a modern Western import. Instead, they are an intrinsic part of this region's history.

Continued on page 4

THE FIRST CSBR SEXUALITY INSTITUTE



CSBR organized the very first international institute on sexuality in Muslim societies between August 16- 23, 2008 in Malaysia. The training brought together leading sexual rights activists, researchers and practitioners from 14 countries; Bangladesh, Indonesia, Lebanon, Mali, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, South Africa, the Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, and Uzbekistan.

The holistic approach of the Institute, which combined historical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks of sexuality in Muslim societies, with emerging issues, field experiences, and thematic analyses provided an innovative, interdisciplinary curriculum.

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ARMED CLASHES IN BANGLADESH: ISLAMIST POLITICAL PARTIES AGAINST WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT POLICY

By Sabina Faiz Rashid, BRAC University, Bangladesh

An alliance of two religious right political parties in Bangladesh, Khelafat Majlish and Islami Shashontantra Andolan, recently formed the Anti-Quran Law Resistance Committee to protest the National Women's Development Policy 2008 (NWDP) formulated by the Bangladeshi government.



"Bigots fight fiercely with cops to protest women policy"

Bangladesh government is pushing ahead with the new policy, despite criticism and violent protest from a section of Muslim clerics and some Islamic political parties. "The policy has been designed to ensure equal rights for women in all spheres of national life and also to ensure safety and security for women in the national, social and family environment" said the country's chief advisor Fakhruddin Ahmed. Key features of the policy include reserving one-third of parliamentary seats for women and their direct election, as well as new laws to ensure equal opportunity of women in terms of control of their earned property.

The religious right groups oppose the policy claiming that the policy's position on equal ownership of property for women would violate Sharia law on inheritance, which orders that a woman should inherit only half of what her brother would get. However, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs deemed the criticism as misplaced and pointed out that the new policy ensured equal rights of women only with regard to property they had earned themselves, not with regard to what they inherited.

Prior to the clash, the Anti-Quran Law Resistance Committee held a rally on the mosque ground where they threatened to topple the government if it did not amend the new NWDP and also demanded the resignation of the advisor to the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. As Hameeda Hossain, a prominent activist noted in a recent editorial piece, there is nothing new in the policy itself, and, in fact, these commitments had been made earlier in the Constitution, the CEDAW, the Beijing Plan of Action, the UN Millennium Development Goals and the National Rural Support Program.

The recommendations range from ridiculous to downright alarming...

The law advisors ensured Islamic scholars that the interim government would not pass any law on inheritance while some other officials formed a committee to review any clause in the policy that may go against the Islamic rules. In response, women's rights organizations held seminars and meetings to express their dismay and challenged the government for forming such a review committee. The *ulema* in the committee is noted to say that "a woman cannot enjoy rights equal to a man's because a woman is not equal to a man by birth ... Not only is it impossible to establish equal rights for men and women in the country, but in some cases giving women equality would deprive them of their rights in many sectors." The recommendations range from ridiculous to downright alarming, and till now (as of November 2008) have not been publicly rejected by the government. The twenty-member committee suggested inclusion of guidelines "in the light of the Quran and Sunnah" while taking any decision regarding women's rights. They asked the government to clarify the phrase "women's equal rights to earned movable and immovable properties" and follow Islamic provisions on inheritance if the earned properties include inherited properties and also recommended abolishing the section that suggests steps to implement the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). They even asked the government to withdraw Bangladesh from the convention as they viewed many sections in it as against the belief, spirit and culture of the Muslim *ummah* (community).

As of November 1, 2008, women's groups are still demanding to know the government's position. They have been informed by the government that the policy remains in place, but the reality is that since the demonstrations by Islamic groups, the government has not made any public proclamations upholding the women's development policy. The government continues to remain evasive and there is very little discussion on how the women's development policy will be implemented. Women's groups and organizations are extremely worried about the situation particularly since the Muslim religious right groups have demonstrated their superior capacity to organize, the state of emergency notwithstanding. The Caretaker government's reign will end on December 18, with national elections coming up and it remains to be seen what happens next, but few remain optimistic of the outcome.

The ulema in the committee is noted to say that "a woman cannot enjoy rights equal to a man's because a woman is not equal to a man by birth ..."

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CSBR MEMBER DR. NADERA SHALHOUB-KEVORKIAN RECEIVES THE 2008 GRUBER WOMEN'S RIGHTS PRIZE



CSBR co-founder Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian has been announced one of the recipients of 2008 Gruber Women's Rights Prize. This is the second time in a row CSBR has been honored with this award: Last year CSBR co-founder Pinar Ilkcaracan, CSBR and WWHR - New Ways shared the Gruber Women's Rights Prize.

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian is a leading criminologist, clinical social worker, and human rights advocate from Palestine. She has done groundbreaking work on violence against women, child abuse, virginity testing, women and law, and femicide.

She initiated the first hotline in the West Bank and Gaza at the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) and is the director of the Gender Studies Project at Mada al-Carmel: Arab Center for Applied Social Research, both organizational members of CSBR. She is a Senior Lecturer at the Hebrew University and a visiting Professor of Law and Women's Studies at USC and UCLA in the USA. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian shared the award with Yanar Mohammed -- a co-founder of Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, and Sapana Pradhan Malla president of the Forum for Women, Law & Development.

CALL FOR SOLIDARITY: LAMBDAISTANBUL LGBTT SOLIDARITY ASSOCIATION APPEALS TO SUPREME COURT TO REVERSE DISSOLUTION VERDICT

Lambdaistanbul Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBTT) Solidarity Association has been active as a grassroots organization in Turkey since 1993. The association decided to gain official status by registering with the Office of Associations in May, 2006. However, shortly after the registration, the City Government of Istanbul launched a court case against Lambdaistanbul and asked for its closure, on the grounds the association was posing a threat to "public morality". Although the prosecutor rejected the claims and concluded that there was no substantial reason to launch the case, the issue was taken to court. Despite the report of the legal expert clearly stating that there was no substantial reason to close down the association, the local court issued a verdict against Lambdaistanbul on May 29th, 2008 ordering its dissolution.

On June 24, 2008 Lambdaistanbul appealed to the Supreme Court. The first hearing of the appeal will be held on November 25, 2008 in Ankara. We invite all LGBT people and allies who believe in democracy, equality, and social justice to protest the local court's decision against Lambdaistanbul and to demand an overruling by the Supreme Court. We invite everyone to join us in speaking up against oppression and standing up for our right to organize that is not only recognized by international law but is also secured under Turkish Constitution for all citizens.

Letters of support can be sent to lambda@lambdaistanbul.org



*Over 1500
LGBTT
activists from
Turkey and
around the world
came together for the
Istanbul LBGTT Pride this
June sending a strong
message of solidarity and
determination.*

THE 2ND KARTINI NETWORK CONFERENCE "THE FUTURE OF ASIAN FEMINISMS"

The 2nd conference of Kartini, the Asian European Network for Women's and Gender Studies, took place in Bali, Indonesia on 2-5 November. CSBR member and Kartini Network co-founder Nursyahbani Katjasungkana chaired the conference organizing committee. With over 200 activists, academicians and researchers attending, the conference theme was "Confronting Fundamentalisms, Conflict and Neoliberalism." Assessing past experiences and charting new paths of Asian feminism through analysis of issues such as legal campaigns, economic restructuring, migration, the rise of fundamentalisms, neoliberalism, the conference was structured around panels on women's and gender studies in Asia: Historical perspective and future challenges, fundamentalisms and feminisms, conflicts and violence, sexuality, poverty, vulnerability and livelihoods.

If one of us ain't free ...*

By Julian C.H. Lee, Monash University, Malaysia

Continuing from the cover page...

Dr Noor noted that in the ancient stories set in the time of Prince Panji (c. 13th to 17th century), it was clear that men enchanted by and having relationships with each other was not something that raised so much as an eyebrow in our region's past. In fact, far from being a negative force, it seems such a relationship was able to bring a war to an end!

Vision of freedom

The three-day event (August 29 - 31), called *Seksualiti Merdeka* and held at The Annexe Gallery in Central Market, Kuala Lumpur, was full of such surprising tales, as well as spirited talks and discussions.

The event was organized to help make Malaysia's national celebrations meaningful for members of sexually diverse communities and their friends. Its motto, "If one of us ain't free, none of us are," was reflected in the broad support it sought. It was held on the Merdeka weekend to make a link between the Merdeka spirit and a vision of marginalized sexualities being able to live more freely in Malaysia.



Seksualiti Merdeka, Malaysia 2008

Also worthy of note was the calibre of the supporters of the event, with everyone from activists and scholars to actors, a Parliamentarian, and other high-profile persons attending to either listen or give talks and participate in panel discussions. The main anchor of the event was a series of seminars and a workshop at which issues pertaining to sexuality in Malaysia were discussed among experts and the general public.

To live without fear

The first of these seminars, *To Live Without Fear: Dealing with Violence Against Transsexuals*, dealt with the experiences of transsexual Malaysians, their difficulties and the discrimination they face.

What was clear from this panel was that transsexuals face enormous social hurdles in making their way in life, and that these are owing to unjustified but common prejudices.

On Saturday afternoon (Aug 30), any notions that the world of academia could not generate public interest with its research, were thoroughly dispelled.

To a full auditorium, Benjamin McKay, Dr Sharon Bong, both of Monash University, and former Universiti Malaya lecturer Wong Yuen Mei presented findings from research they had conducted into sexuality issues at the *Probing Sexualities* session.

Show of support for sexual diversity

In another session, *Heartbreakers Anonymous*, audiences heard amusing and moving stories from Malaysians about growing up different and finding strength to be who they are. And in *Malaysian Artists For Diversity*, well known names like former *Malaysian Idol* contestant Nikki, 3R TV host Rafidah Abdullah, and singer-activist Shanon Shah spoke up in support of equality.

While celebrating Malaysia's independence from colonialism and reclaiming possession of our own nation, at The Annexe Gallery that weekend, some Malaysians were making the case for the next form of merdeka: the reclaiming of the rightful place of sexual diversity in Malaysia, and freedom from discrimination and abuse towards an accepting, informed and tolerant society.

**A longer version of this article was published in the Star, Sunday September 14, 2008.*

<http://thestar.com.my/lifestyle/story.asp?file=/2008/9/14/lifefocus/1977271&sec=lifefocus>

THE FIRST CSBR SEXUALITY INSTITUTE

By Liz E. Amado, WWHR - New Ways, Turkey

Continuing from the cover page...

Themes addressed included human sexuality, historical overview of sexualities in Muslim societies, Shariah and sexuality, sexual diversities and non-conforming sexualities in Muslim societies, sexual health, HIV/AIDS, gender and politics, youth sexuality and sexuality education, sexuality and war, and advocacy for sexual rights. The extensive discussions on gender and sexual diversities were the most liberating sessions, challenging both the myths that sexual diversities is a "western" phenomenon, as well as participants' own preconceived notions around sexuality.

From the discussions, the diversity of contested sexuality issues in face of rising conservatism were evident, ranging from FGM to moral policing, LGBT to sexual harassment, discriminatory laws to sexuality education. However participants also noted that in most cases the opponents of sexual rights employed similar discourses and arguments based on claims dichotomizing what is "moral" vs "immoral", "Islamic" vs "non-Islamic", "Islamic" vs "Western".

Given the challenging and isolated contexts most participants worked in, this groundbreaking initiative provided a unique opportunity to further the knowledge and understanding of sexuality, while also creating the space to build solidarity and alliances between participants and paving the way for future collaboration.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CSBR SEXUALITY INSTITUTE

Mahrugh Mohiuddin
BRAC University, Bangladesh

I WOULD SUMMARIZE THE EXPERIENCE I HAD AT THE CSBR INSTITUTE IN ONE WORD - THAT IS: **LIBERATING**. New knowledge and enlightenment in any form is liberating, but this truly was different. It stood out with its uniqueness in more than one way. The novelty of this discourse in our socio-cultural context is certainly one important aspect, but more importantly, the silence that our society harbors around sexuality has become so "normal" that we often forget how integral it is to our existence and well-being. The CSBR Institute harped on this fact once more, and did so very effectively.

My personal upbringing is probably no different than many other women in my country. With so much silence around notions and



misconceptions of sexuality, I see men and women, particularly women, having to constantly carry with them the discomforts of puberty for the rest of their lives. Even though I had worked in the areas of HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, something seemed to be missing.

I was fortunate to be part of the organizing team for the International Gender and Sexuality Workshop that our school (BRAC School of Public Health) organized in July 2007. That was the first ever professional/academic event of the kind in Bangladesh, and participants felt that this was an eye-opening experience for them in many respects. For me, I constantly felt that one needs to be deeply connected with their realization of sexuality and that's a prerequisite for any action, intervention or research one undertakes in a context where there is a constant thrust towards "Islamization." The CSBR Institute reaffirmed this belief and took me forward by a significant number of steps. I gained subtlety in my understanding and feel that the Institute gave me the confidence and comfort that I needed desperately in my research investigation on sexuality and rights that is currently underway. My exposure to the wide range of resources and knowledge gained from the Institute will help refine our interpretations and add dimensions to the findings that I may have missed otherwise. I am also incorporating cases and exercises on sexuality in the class I'll be teaching, because this has now become a priority for me. I realize that sexuality is at the core of many health problems that we face on a day to day basis.

More than anything else, the Institute was a significant personal journey for me. I thank the amazing organizers, facilitators, and the participants for their warmth, their depth of knowledge and experience, and their passion for sharing the inspiration with people from all over the world. *Change is possible - you made us believe in it yet again...*

Sai Jothi
ARROW, Malaysia

IN A NUTSHELL I UNDERSTOOD THAT SEXUALITY IS ABOUT THE RIGHT TO PLEASURE, right to self determination and right to bodily integrity. The whole training took the participants through a historical understanding of sexualities in the Muslim societies, and made the clear distinctions between practices that are cultural and tend to be noted as religious by fundamentalist groups. For example how sexual desire is noted as manifestation of god's wisdom and foretaste of heaven and how capitalism and industrial revolution has an impact on sexual behaviour and morality. The existence of infinite spectrum of sexualities and genders was very well put forward in the training. The presentation of case studies, to substantiate the theoretical understanding reinforced the learnings at the Institute very well, for instance the existence and recognition of sexual diversities in various country contexts, like Indonesia, Malaysia. The Institute provided a scientific understanding of sexual health and HIV/AIDS, as well as the feminization of HIV/AIDS and its impact...

Ebenezer Drojaye
University of the Free State, South Africa

I FOUND PARTICULARLY INTERESTING AND ENRICHING THE TOPIC ON THE HISTORY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY. It was the first time I learned the various theories with regard to human sexuality. This was indeed quite revealing to me and most memorable. As a human rights activist I have always learned about the evolution of sexual rights without any knowledge with regard to human sexuality. It was therefore a new and rewarding experience for me. Also, this was the first time that in a training of this nature 'unpopular topics' in sexual rights - gay, lesbian, transgender etc- were clearly brought to the fore and made an important part of the curriculum. It sends a very strong message of breaking the long silence on these issues in most societies. Rather than adopting a narrow approach to the teaching of sexual rights, the Institute broke new ground by adopting a holistic approach to the teaching of sexual rights...

Tahir Khilji
Vision, Pakistan

CSBR INSTITUTE AND WHAT DO I THINK ABOUT IT? I think for me as a person living in Pakistan and more or less being all by myself in creating spaces where sexuality and its different manifestations within the frame work of human rights can be discussed and reflected upon, this Institute provided a platform where I can share and also hear from others who are doing similar work. In most situations where the state and religion is forming partnerships that create an environment that is not conducive to free thinking and free speech, such forums/institute act as mechanisms in reinforcing the conviction in the cause one is battling for and also create places of knowledge to say the least...

PRECEDENT SENTENCE AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN EGYPT

In October 2008 the Cairo Criminal Court issued the sentence of a 3 year imprisonment and interim compensation of 5,001 LE for the assault of 27-year old Noha Rushdie. The release by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), that is leading the campaign against sexual harassment, states "this sentence sends a message to all segments of Egyptian society that sexual harassment is a crime and will not be tolerated. The sentence will also encourage participation in the dialogue on developing a legal definition of sexual harassment and the need to formulate laws criminalizing it in the Egyptian Penal Code." According to a recent study conducted by the ECWR, only 2.4% of the 1,010 women surveyed who experienced sexual harassment filed reports of the incident.

For more information: http://ecwronline.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1&lang=english

UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES ON SEXUALITY:

53rd Session of the UN CSW

The 53rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will consider the theme "the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS." The CSW will be held at the UN headquarters in New York from 2 to 13 March, 2009. For more information: <http://un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/53sess.htm>

VII IASSCS Conference

The 7th Biennial Meeting of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS), entitled "Contested Innocence - Sexual Agency in Public and Private Space," will take place in Hanoi, Vietnam, 16 - 18 April, 2009.

For more information: www.iasscs.org/2009conference

SVRI Forum 2009

The first conference of the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 6 - 9 July, 2009. For more information: <http://svriforum2009.svri.org/>

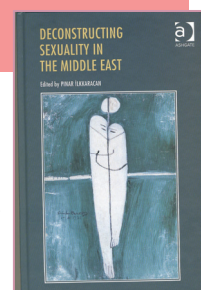
Feature Publications

Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and Discourses

Edited by Pinar Ilkkaracan; Ashgate Publishing, September 2008

Exploring the contemporary dynamics of sexuality in the Middle East, this volume offers an in-depth and unique insight into this much contested and debated issue. Edited by CSBR co-founder Pinar Ilkkaracan, the volume focuses on the role of sexuality in political and social struggles and the politicization of sexuality and gender in the region. Contributors illustrate the complexity of discourses, debates and issues, focusing in particular on the situation in Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Palestine and Turkey, and explain how they cannot be reduced to a single underlying factor such as religion, or a simple binary opposition between the religious right and feminists. Contributors include renowned academicians, researchers, psychologists, historians, human rights and women's rights advocates and political scientists, offering a balanced and contemporary perspective on this important issue, as well as highlighting the implication of these debates in larger socio-political contexts.

The book is available for order at www.ashgate.com and www.amazon.com



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WWHR - New Ways

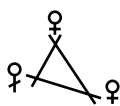
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WWHR - New Ways

Surfacing: Selected Papers on Religious Fundamentalisms and Their Impact on Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

ARROW, October 2008

Surfacing is a compilation of papers that came out of the ARROW symposium held on this theme at the 4th APCRS in Hyderabad last year. The papers discuss the impact of Roman Catholic, Hindu and Islamic fundamentalisms on sexual and reproductive health and rights and strategies to overcome the obstacles; explore the convergences around the various types and forms of religious fundamentalisms across the region; and present ways to move forward toward meeting the challenges of religious fundamentalisms in the Asia-Pacific region. *The book is available for download at* http://www.arrow.org.my/images/publications/arrowsurfacing_4web.pdf

Sexuality, Health and Human Rights

by Sonia Corrêa, Richard Parker, Rosalind Petchesky; Routledge, August 2008

The volume provides a critical analysis of shifting theoretical perspectives and activist strategies regarding sexual politics and their larger geopolitical context. The book surveys the "Global 'Sex' Wars" in the shadow of both religious resurgence and political conservatism; new research agendas in the face of biomedical discourses and HIV/AIDS; and "The Promises and Limits of Sexual Rights."

The book is available for order at www.amazon.com