Interview

The Algerian experience, and beyond. The European Left and the Muslim far-right – Our Urgent Tasks

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In 1984, she founded the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and served as its international coordinator for 18 years. WLUML linked women fighting for their rights in Muslim contexts, throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. WLUML focused on research and grassroots solidarity work aimed at reinforcing local struggles. In 2004, she founded the international Secularism Is A Women's Issue (SIAWI) network, and serves at its international coordinator. She is currently based in India.

She spoke to Solidarity [Britain] about the struggles of women, workers, and other democratic and progressive forces against the Muslim far-right in Algeria and elsewhere.

Solidarity: For many years, large parts of the global left have regarded political Islam as essentially progressive against the dominant (US) imperialism; what do you think about this analysis? What are its roots?

Marieme Helie Lucas – We can incriminate several factors. The left's traditional focus on the state impeded its ability to decode in time the warning signs of supposedly religious non-state forces rising as powerful extreme-right political actors. Human rights organisations - sorry, comrades, for this unholy comparison but I must make it – also have trouble delinking from an exclusive focus on the state and considering these new players for what they really are. I situate this difficulty at the same level as that of re-identifying and re-defining classes today. One badly feels the need for innovative, intellectually fearless, communist thinkers and theorists to account for the many changes in the world in the last century.

Allow me a digression about the state. The question of "less state" or "more state" is at the heart of the dealings with the Muslim far-right in Europe. Interestingly, in France, the once-grassroots organisation Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS, Neither Whores Nor Submissives), led by women from Muslim migrant descent, was the first one to call on the state to fulfill its obligations vis a vis citizens. The suburbs of big cities had slowly been abandoned by French authorities (police patrols,

which were stoned as soon as they set foot in it, did not dare enter these locations, but neither did the fire brigade, or emergency doctors, not to mention garbage collectors or postmen). As a result, these areas were governed by Muslim fundamentalist groups and organisations who did the social work the state was not doing any more; in the process, among other things, they imposed dress codes and behaviours on the girls. NPNS was set up in response to one of these odious crimes, in which a girl aged 17, whose behaviour was not considered "proper" enough, was burnt alive in the garbage dump of the building where she lived.

In Algeria, we witnessed a similar approach, with Muslim fundamentalist groups taking over and politicising social work: they slowly replaced the state when it abandoned areas to their fate – and, in the process, were imposing their rules, laws, and "justice", terrorising the population, which subsequently also wished for the state to be back in their areas.

Not that the state was ever seen as any good – people loathe our successive governments – but fundamentalists' rule was much worse. After the slaughtering of the population by non-state, far-right armed groups in the 1990s, this reaction increased: people despise President Bouteflika [Algerian president since 1999] (who, in order to stay in power, made all sorts of compromises with the religious far-right and traded with corrupt politicians), but they vote for him in order, they hope, to keep direct far-right theocratic rule at bay.

The terms "political Islam" or "Islamists" are misleading: both suggest religious movements, while they should in fact be characterised in political terms. The left (and far-left) in Europe did not take the trouble of going through a thorough analysis of the political nature of Muslim fundamentalist movements; it mostly saw them as popular movements (which indeed they are, and populist too, but that did not ring any bells, it seems) opposing... you name it: colonisation, capitalism, imperialism, undemocratic governments, etc. The European left only looked at what it thought (often mistakenly, for example when it presumes the Muslim right is anti-capitalist) fundamentalist movements stood against, never at what they wanted to promote. Yes, they stood against our undemocratic governments, but from a far-right perspective. In Algeria, since the nineties, we have been calling them "green-fascists" (green being here the colour of Islam) or "Islamo-fascists".

Many historians in Europe dismiss us when we use the term "fascism". However, their ideologies (if not their historical and economic circumstances) are scarily comparable: it is not the superior Aryan race, but the superior Islamic creed that is the pillar on which they base their superiority, a superiority they infer from a mythical past (the glorious past of Ancient Rome, the Golden Age of Islam, etc.), a superiority which grants them the right and duty to physically eliminate the untermensch (on the one hand: Jews, communists, Gypsies, gays, physically and/or mentally disabled, on the other: kafir, communists, Jews, gays, etc.). Nazis, fascists, and the Muslim far-right all want women in their place, "church/mosque, kitchen, and cradle", and all of them are pro-capitalists: the Muslim right calls on the rich to performing the Islamic duty of *zakkat* (charity), which leaves untouched the power structure, and the "poor" in their place too, which is god's will.

Overlooking the political nature of the armed Muslim far-right had terrible consequences for us, anti-fundamentalists from Muslim countries. What Cheikh Anta Diop, the famous Senegalese historian, used to call, in another context, "leftist laziness", needs to be blamed and exposed.

If we agree that Muslim fundamentalism is a far-right movement, the question then becomes: can the left support far-right, fascist-type movements in the name of anti-imperialism? And an additional question is: is there still, in this day and age, only one imperialism (i.e., US imperialism)? Or are there emerging imperialisms, for example in oil-rich countries, which should now be taken into account? Is the promotion of the religious far-right, in various forms, one of the elements in the global strategy of these emerging powers?

A simplistic approach, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", supplemented the old dichotomy between the "main" enemy and the "secondary" enemy that so very few thinkers on the left and far-left have questioned in relation to Muslim fundamentalist movements. As women, we experienced the "main enemy" theory being been used against movements for women's rights: it was never the right time to demand these rights; they should be postponed until after decolonisation; until after the liberation struggle; until after the reconstruction of the country; until we gain some political stability...

Let me pay tribute here to Daniel Bensaïd, one of the lone voices on the left with a better perspective on this issue. In *La Republique Imaginaire* (2005), he writes (my own translation from French): "The control of capital over bodies, its strong will to reveal their market value, does not at all reduce their control by religious law and the theological will to make them disappear...The poor dialectic of main and secondary contradictions, forever revolving, already played too many bad tricks. And the 'secondary enemy', too often underestimated, because the fight against the main enemy was claimed to be a priority, has sometimes been deadly".

Bensaïd goes on to quote Erich Fried's poem: "Totally caught into my struggle against the main enemy / I was shot by my secondary enemy / Not from the back, treacherously, as his main enemies claim / But directly, from the position it has long been occupying / And in keeping with his declared intentions that I did not bother about, thinking they were insignificant".

So-called "political Islam" is treated by the left in a way which is very different from its treatment of any other popular far-right movement working under the guise of religion. In fact, I should say that "Islam" is treated differently from any other religion. Jewish fundamentalism or Christian fundamentalism, even in oppressed groups, would not be met with such patronising benignity; they would be analysed, in terms of class for instance, and of ideology, of political program. Nothing of the sort is even attempted for supposedly Muslim groups: no research is done on those who plant bombs and organise attacks in Europe or North America, for instance – it is assumed that they are lumpen, while the evidence is that they are from lower-middle-class and educated backgrounds, mostly middle-range engineers or technicians. "Leftist laziness" again...

Imagine for one second what would be the reaction of the left if even working-class or lower-middle-class Jews in France had been attacking Muslim schools and killing pupils, or the customers of "Arab" groceries; how come that when it is "Muslims" doing it to "Jews", the left starts looking for good reasons they may have had for doing so? I cannot help feeling there is hidden racism at work here, against "Muslims" who are seen as such inferior people that barbaric behaviour is naturally to be expected from them.

To a situation of oppression there is no "automatic" response: there are several possible responses: one from the far-right, but - also ! - one from the left, a revolutionary one. Accepting – even implicitly - the idea that joining fascist groups is the only possible response to a situation of oppression, or to racism, exclusion, and economic hardship, etc., seems like an incredible twist of fate coming from the left!

Solidarity: What are the key progressive resistance movements (working-class, feminist, secular-democratic, etc.) to the religious far-right?

It is extremely different from country to country. Some countries still have, in specific industries, a vibrant left trade-unionist tradition (mining in Tunisia, the textile industry in Egypt), while in other countries working-class organisations have been virtually eradicated either under colonial occupation or by undemocratic governments (or both, as is the case in Algeria). Clearly, the situation in Algeria in the 1990, with a near-extinct left, reduced to groups surviving in hiding, was different

from that in Tunisia or in Egypt today, and even more so from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Mali, etc.

Left-wing organisations in Algeria (or rather, what was left of them after the successive waves of repression by the colonial power and by our independent governments), did not unanimously and systematically oppose the armed religious far-right in the 1990s; while some did (for example, Parti de l'Avant-Garde Socialiste and Parti Algérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme; their leaders were hunted down, and had to survive in hiding or in exile), others (such as the Parti des Travailleurs, - editor's note: linked to the Lambertistes in France-) sided with "the people" combating our undemocratic regime, regardless of their political and ideological stance. In that sense, our situation was not different from that of the left or far-left parties in Europe today, which are still grappling with how to react to the Muslim far-right.

In my experience, the women's movement has been the most steadily opposed to religious fundamentalists everywhere, for the simple reason that women are their first victims. To start with, under the political influence of the religious far-right, governments are far too happy to negotiate social peace at the cost of women's rights. Hence, one of the first steps that is generally taken to appease the Muslim far-right is to change the laws on personal status (or family codes) and make them more "Islamic", i.e. laws which affect primarily women by regulating marriage, divorce, polygamy, repudiation, alimony, custody of children, inheritance, etc.

For instance in Algeria, fundamentalists started pushing for reform (while we were still under the prorogated colonial Napoleon Code – not exactly a very progressive law, but what we ended up with was much worse!) immediately after independence; they presented one bill under the government of Ben Bella (1962-65), and two more under the government of Boumediene (1965-78). These proposals deprived us of many of the rights we had previously enjoyed. For example, we had no legal capacity to enter into a contract on our own; were to be given in marriage by a matrimonial tutor; only the husband could initiate a divorce; repudiation and polygyny were legalised; we lost access to custody or guardianship of children upon divorce; we needed our matrimonial tutor's written permission for seeking a job and traveling; etc. So much for rewarding Algerian women's participation in the liberation struggle!

The first three fundamentalist attempts to reform family law were rejected, at a time when, although there was no organised left-wing political force capable of countering the fundamentalist project, there were still prominent left-wing individuals with influence inside the government. It was a sure sign of the decline of these leftist individuals' influence in the high spheres when a fourth proposal was finally adopted by the National Assembly in May 1984, under the Chadli government, despite the visible opposition by women's groups, including the symbolically and morally powerful organisation of former-mujahidates (i.e., the women veterans of the liberation struggle). Most of the above mentioned provisions were adopted, except for the need to gain a guardian's permission in order to work. That, perhaps, was a little too far for a so-called "socialist" country.

How on earth could any of the legal measures taken against women citizens of Algeria serve "anti-imperialism"? Would the left support the Christian right if it succeeded in imposing similar legislation? 22 years after independence, we became forever second-class citizens, always under the thumb of a "tutor": father, husband, brother, even son, or an appointed judge if there is no male left in the family. A few amendments were introduced, under feminist pressure, in 2005. Others are slated for 2015, although their content is yet to be announced.

So, actually, women have no choice but to oppose the fundamentalist influence on shaping the laws that affect them. I have seen similar situations in different parts of North Africa, the Middle East, West Africa, or Asia, with women's groups becoming aware of the rise of the religious far-right through the curtailing of their basic rights under family laws.

One more word about the inanity of the "Islamic" reference, and the need for straightforward political qualification of "political Islam": What is really interesting is that this pernicious Muslim far-right does not really bother to check on whether their demands are Islamic or not. If it suits their reactionary program, they promote barbaric cultural practices, such as the pre-Islamic practise of female genital mutilation (FGM), or even conservative colonial laws (in Algeria, the 1920 law criminalising reproductive rights; in Pakistan, the Victorian law that deprived women of any right to inheritance), "in the name of Islam".

Fundamentalists export the worst cultural practices, regardless of whether they actually have an Islamic character, across schools of thought within Islam, and across national and continental boundaries. For instance, they tried to export FGM (which is historically limited to the sphere of influence of Ancient Egypt in Africa) to Sri Lanka, and more recently to Tunisia, where it was previously unheard of. They succeeded in importing it to the Muslim enclave of Sandzak in Serbia – yes, in the heart of Europe.

Similarly, the specifically Shia custom of *muta'a* marriage (temporary marriage or marriage of pleasure; a disguised form of prostitution), was imported to Mālikī Sunni countries such as Algeria, where it was unheard of. *Muta'a* marriage which was the "Islamic" justification the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (Groupe Islamique Armé, GIA) gave for kidnapping girls from their families during attacks on villages and bringing them to their guerilla camps as domestic and sexual slaves (they actually used the word "slave" in Arabic). It is the justification Daesh (Islamic State) and Boko Haram give for doing the same now. The transmission of this Shia practice to countries where it was unknown came via Iranian military instructors in guerilla training camps in Peshawar. Passed off as generically "Islamic", it thus spread through the young men trained there, to places such as Algeria, or Nigeria, where it never existed before. Kidnapping women "slaves" and raping them thus became sanctified as an "Islamic" right to impregnate them with "good Muslims".

It is important to understand that attempts to change laws and social mores, and to amend programs in schools according to supposedly Islamic principles, just precede the violent physical attacks against those deemed kafir - free thinkers and intellectuals, artists, journalists, and women.

Let me remind you that attempts to curb democratically-voted laws and secular school curricula, or to shape social mores according to fundamentalist morality, are currently taking place now in Western Europe and in Canada. Think of "Sharia courts" (UK); or "religious arbitration courts on family matters" (Canada); of demands for ban on biology classes, on music or art classes (everywhere); of attempts to get a marriage annulled for lack of "an essential quality" in the marriage contract (i.e., the virginity of the bride) (France); of demands for female-only personnel in hospitals to care for women (France); of enforced sex segregation in universities (UK and Canada); of insistence on head covering for girls in free secular primary and secondary state schools (France); of introducing "Sharia-compliant" wills depriving women, non-Muslim spouses, or adopted children rights to inheritance (UK); etc. All the demands now made in "the West" were first successfully tested in our countries of origin.

The unorganised left is also a pole of resistance to the religious far right. After the targeting of women and women's rights, then comes the individual targeting of those branded kafir: the numerous murders of leftist individuals (the free thinkers murdered recently in Bangladesh; the murder of secularists throughout the past few years in Pakistan; the murder of leftist politicians and union leaders in Tunisia; the artists, intellectuals, and journalists who were decimated in Algeria throughout the 1990s; or *Charlie Hebdo*'s cartoonists in France). I think we should pay tribute to all these left-leaning people who continue to struggle in such isolation against our local brand of fascism, with no backing and no organised form of support system.

After attacks on women, and broadly leftist milieus, a third step is mass assassinations: entire villages in Algeria in the 1990s; specific ethnic/religious categories of people right now under Daesh. Oppressed populations hate Muslim fundamentalists: Nigerians under Boko Haram, or Malians from the North who experienced the violent repression of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. But this is not an organised resistance.

There is also a small libertarian movement in the making, which is of much interest. This includes the growing number of generally young people who stand for secularism, and sometimes even for atheism, whatever the consequences for their freedom and their lives. There are many bloggers among them, who probably hope not to be discovered. Many of them are in jail right now in different countries in North Africa and the Middle East, and in East Asia.

Among those are the "breakers of fast", who organise public picnics during Ramdan in Algeria and in Morocco. They oppose state enforcement of religion and religious rituals. They usually get beaten up and arrested, and sometimes jailed for long terms. Interestingly, in Algeria, many declared believers support them and stand by them during their breaking of fast, in order to protect them from arrest; they too demand a secular state. It seems to be an emerging trend, which did not previously exist. They need visibility and support.

For many of us, what is happening now in Europe is the exact replication, step by step, of what we fled from in our countries of origin. While intense pressure is put on abandoning secularism in law and education, in the name of minority and religious rights, through more and more (very un-)"reasonable accommodations" to the religious right, we also witness individuals forced into religious identities by virtue of their geographical origin or their Arabic-sounding names, and we witness the erosion of hard-won citizenship to the benefit of "communities" in Europe.

In other words it is the announced end of formal democracy (in the most classical sense of the word, where laws are voted and changeable by the will of the people rather than being imposed, ahistorical and unchangeable, in the name of the divine) for hapless individuals forced into a creed, and subsequently into a tailor-made law. It is also the end of formal equality of citizens before the law, since different categories of citizens would have different and unequal rights under different un-voted laws. Whatever the limitations of bourgeois democracy are, one should think twice before exchanging it for theocratic fundamentalist rule.

Opposing the religious far-right when they are organised militarily and commit crimes and murders is too late in the day; they have to be combated as an ideology, a far-right ideology, before they reach the stage of armed struggle.

Solidarity: What effect does western leftist apologism for political Islam have on the struggles of socialists in Muslim-majority countries?

For us, it is Munich everyday. We feel like the anti-Nazi Germans and the Republican Spaniards must have felt; abandoned by those who should have been our allies.

I would like to flag up two specific consequences in Algeria – not just for socialist struggles but for the entire population. The first is the effect on the many left-leaning people who were not formally part of any left organisation (party or union). Just as they turned away from "human rights" when the major human rights organisations supported Muslim fundamentalists but not their victims, i.e., the population at large, people now tend to distance themselves not just from left organisations but also from left analysis and thinking. The organised left in Algeria was decimated; now it is reduced to virtually nothing, except for the one party that shamelessly (or would you say strategically?) allied with the Muslim far-right. Our former allies now look for other ways to resist fundamentalists.

The ideologically pervasive progress of the Muslim far-right is visible in the fact that religion is routinely invoked more and more in private conversations, as a cultural reference, far more than ever before. One cannot foresee all the consequences of this new trend. But, definitely, socialist thinking is losing ground. People have lost faith in communism; it is not much in the picture any more. The ideas of socialism or communism are not popular any longer. If one thinks back to the years after independence, to how ordinary citizens would analyse problems at that time, it is a tragedy that we have lost so much ground.

The fragmentation of the people weakens any political initiative. Opponents of both the regime and the Muslim far-right are not able to come together, not even on very simple issues. With the world-celebrated political "liberalisation" in our countries, numerous little parties pop up, to no effect, splitting over anything and everything. One can see in the context of each election the growing inability of the left forces to come together as a front against the regime, and/or against the Muslim right. And one could also see the same phenomenon in Tunisia.

The second consequence is more difficult to describe, but it is a very important one in my view, which has never been discussed in left circles. What comes to mind is: living in a mad world, where concepts are turned upside down, where there is no reality any more, where the ground is unstable under your feet, where "left" and "right" have no sense or meaning.

Imagine a situation in which fascists slaughter around 200,000 people in the 1990s – ordinary people, not necessarily the fighting type, but people who send their children to school, or bring them to hospital, or get a birth certificate from the town hall – as GIA has decided that anything to do with the government is *kafir*, that people who use the facilities of the *kafir* government are *kafir* themselves, and that *kafir* deserve capital punishment. Imagine these people who are murdered, not one family spared, some losing up to 18 to 20 members of their family at once, in an attack on a village. Others see with their own eyes what is being done - torture and killing of their loved ones, women, girls, children. They have reasons to be deeply traumatised.

Now imagine that the killers, or their leaders, or the representatives of their parties, are invited abroad to speak in left, far-left, and human rights circles, or at the Social Forums (in Porto Alegre and Bombay), or at the UN. Imagine that they are granted asylum in Europe while you are denied it, although your name has been listed on a sheet of paper pinned up on a mosque door calling for your "execution", and you have exhausted your possibilities for hiding at friends' houses. Imagine that, while they killed so many of your family, friends, and comrades and hunt you down, you are the one branded "eradicator", and blamed publicly in international media for demanding from your government not the physical elimination, but the political elimination, of the Muslim far-right – for instance by suspending the electoral process in 1991 (as unions, women's organisations, and the left did at the time), and that you are therefore the one branded "anti-democracy", and your killers are supported as great "democrats".

Imagine that your daughter has been publicly beheaded, her head subsequently paraded in front of her friends and her breasts cut off in the street, for refusing to obey head-covering orders. And then you read in the newspapers or hear on TV that, in Europe, the left, far-left, and human rights organisations often support "the right to veil", and that they give a platform to the ideologues that encouraged the killings.

You live in madness, in a world where words don't have meaning any more, a world where you can expect anything from anybody, with no logic. A very very threatening world.

20 years after independence, I documented some devastating emotional consequences of the torture people had suffered at the hands of the French colonial army during the liberation struggle. I came

across cases of men, fathers, who tortured their young kids for extremely minor offenses or disobedience (like coming home late or getting a bad mark in school), just as they had been tortured – by electricity shocks, water suffocation, hanging, etc. The fathers' trauma had unforeseen consequences on their children's lives. Having witnessed such cases, I can only speculate on what will be the unexpected consequences of the literally unthinkable situation Algerians suffered during the 1990s, which I described above: not just the actual trauma of what we called "a war against civilians", of atrocious murders, and barbaric actions, but the additional trauma of being the one blamed for it.

Scientific research shows that, in cases of sexual violence and rape, there is an initial traumatic shock (the physical act of rape), but very often there is an additional second trauma when the victim is not acknowledged as a victim, and rather is blamed for what has been done to her. According to professionals, it is the second trauma that leaves more enduring scars in the psyche. Victims who are immediately recognised as such, who are supported and comforted, and helped in demanding justice in court, do not suffer the same dramatic after effects.

Hundreds of thousands Algerians lived through such a double shock, who lost in the process any sense of right and wrong, saw the killers rewarded, including financially, through the adoption of the misnamed "Charter of Reconciliation", and had nobody they could trust to understand this situation and have mercy on them.

Incidentally, this Charter – a presidential decree - was approved the world over, by short-sighted parties of the left, right, and centre, in the name of restoring peace in Algeria. Among other atrocities, it makes it illegal for any family member to enquire about how, when, and by whom a victim was assassinated or disappeared. That this was probably designed and serves to cover up for the government forces' abuses is obvious, but it should not blur the fact that it also whitewashes the far more numerous atrocities committed by the fascist Muslim armed forces on innocent people, including the many children who continued going to school, the many girls who stepped out of home bare headed, the women who went for treatment to state hospitals, or the entire villages exterminated as *kafir*. What this decree has been legally organising is in fact an intergenerational transmission of trauma, the magnitude of which we will discover in years to come.

There are indications that the collective trauma could already have devastating consequences. At the start of the 2000s, pogroms against internal-migrant women workers in oil-rich cities of Southern Algeria took place, in which they were subjected to horrendous tortures and death, for earning their families' living away from their "guardians" remaining in the North. It was not just identifiable far-right political groups that targeted them, but entire neighborhoods.

This is one of the never-discussed consequences of our abandonment by the European left - not just us, the Algerian left, but everyone in the country. The political consequences of the trauma are yet to be explored and studied.

Solidarity: What can socialists internationally do to help those in the Middle East, South Asia, and elsewhere, who are attempting to build an independent camp of working-class and progressive forces against both US-led imperialism and "local" oppressors (political Islam, so-called "anti-imperialist regimes" such as Iran, etc.)?

The left in Europe and North America should first realise that "helping" those already under the boot of the Muslim far-right is also in their own best interests, because the Muslim far-right is already at work in European countries. We are all in the same boat.

Sweep at your doorstep first. Oppose them, then and there. Oppose communalism, and the very

principle of separate laws for unequal categories of citizens, as anti-democratic – not so long ago, that was called apartheid, remember? Challenge the legality of "Sharia courts"; challenge UK universities accepting sex segregation; challenge in court the "Sharia compliant" wills that were encouraged recently. Challenge the political platform that human rights organisations (Amnesty International in the UK, or the Center for Constitutional Rights in the USA) are giving to representatives of the Muslim far-right.

There is an abundant literature from anti-fundamentalist Pakistanis, Iranians, or Algerians that needs to be promoted and given visibility and legitimacy by the left. We cannot easily disseminate our analysis, and xenophobic far-right parties in Europe and North America are interested in appropriating it to their cause.

The Muslim right would not survive and thrive without the active ideological blessings of many liberals, human rights campaigners, and, alas, the left and even feminists. We need to fight on two fronts simultaneously: against discrimination, marginalisation, and racism, and against the Muslim far-right.

As socialists, we should recognise that the fragmentation of the people into smaller and smaller entities, divided along religious or ethnic lines, can only serve capital – and this is probably the reason why liberal democracies tolerate "religious" fundamentalisms and their demands for specific "community'" rights. Within a few decades, workers' struggles have been weakened through successive partitions of their forces: indigenous vs migrant workers' rights and issues; then migrant workers split into Muslim workers, Hindu workers, Sikh workers, etc.

An analysis of the far-right nature of Muslim fundamentalism is a prerequisite: what is/are their program/s, apart from putting everyone under their syncretic, invented, so-called "Sharia law"? What are the means to achieve their goals? Can assassinations of "improperly dressed" girls, or of bloggers, or of left-wing political cartoonists, -be considered legitimate "revolutionary violence"? Has, at any point, any group belonging to the Muslim far-right – Taliban, al-Qaeda, GIA, Daesh, the Shabab, AQIM, etc - combated capitalism? How? Check their pretence of being anti-imperialist. Denounce them publicly as far-right movements; you will be called "Islamophobic". So have we, and many of us died for this reason. "Helping us" starts at home, at your doorstep !

There is a lot of "social work" to be done at home too, from atheist asylum seekers to women fleeing "Islamic punishment", to community youth schemes in poor areas. The left today usually sees these tasks as not revolutionary enough to deserve its time and energy. But let me remind you that in the 1990s, when the GIA was hunting down Algerian *kafir* (literally hunting down), a woman communist friend of mine had to change domicile every other day for three years to escape fundamentalist killers after her name had been pinned on the door of mosques, on the list of people to be killed; but asylum in Europe was reserved for FIS and GIA members. They qualified as being threatened or prosecuted by the state, while their victims were only hunted down and murdered by non-state actors and thus did not qualify. An efficient solidarity system in the hands of the left, of the kind Muslim fundamentalists benefited from from human rights organisations, would have been extremely useful at the time, and unfortunately it may be needed again soon.

The big strength of the fundamentalist far-right is that they understood very early that the state abandonment of its duties towards specific categories of citizens, and the decline of the old Communist Parties' social activities in working-class areas of big cities, created a space for them, whether in our countries or in Europe. "Political Islam" is a popular, and populist, movement. There is a need to re-occupy this lost terrain, which has been the fertile ground on which young men, and now young women too, become "radicalised", thanks to the social work done by the Muslim far-right: the youth camps and sports clubs; the after-school tutoring; the sermons; the free distribution

of clothing (including, of course, distributing so-called "Islamic dress" in the process); and books (including, of course, fundamentalist literature); the material help brought to homes where the bread winner just died; etc. In Algeria, the underground Communist Party did this work under colonial rule, but hardly ever after independence. In France, the Communist Party used to do it 30 years ago, when it was winning nearly 30% of the votes, but it now barely makes 3% and has neither the human nor material resources to carry it out. Far-left parties in France barely do any community work in the suburbs where the majority of the youth is unemployed (with rates up to 50%), and can fall prey to the fundamentalists.

Helping the resistance within needs to be done at many levels. Changing the discourse of the left about the Muslim religious-right, not from a racist, xenophobic point of view, but from a left point of view, will already be such an achievement. Resistance always exists locally, there is no need to invent it. It needs to be highlighted, given visibility and legitimacy. We are the progressive legitimate voice of the people, not the Muslim far-right. But currently, it is the representatives of Muslim fundamentalists who are given visibility in the media, in research, and politically. At least within leftist movements and progressive organisations, give us the floor, don't give it to "moderate Islamists". There are numerous moderate Muslim believers, plenty of moderate people of Muslim descent and background, but there cannot be "moderate Islamists". It is a contradiction in terms; as if "moderate fascists" could exist! We need to be a lot more finicky about the concepts we use.

There is also a need to counter bourgeois discourse on democracy, when it is only equated and limited to an electoral process and when it allows the Hitlers of the day to be elected.

There is an urgent need to lobby at UN level, and at EU level, so that secularism and secular laws will not be done away with in the name of respect of The Other's difference, religious rights, cultural rights, minority rights, etc. As a feminist, I think that women's rights should not be subsumed under all these other "rights", and that the UN's Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an instrument of international law, should be appropriated by the left. There is also a fight to be had to restore the original spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Whether one tries to challenge the Muslim far-right at the UN or with the NAM, neither of these bodies is the kind one would chose to engage with. But it so happens that they both keep strengthening the Muslim far-right internationally in such an efficient way that unfortunately one has to fight on those terrains. One has to try and stop, or even just slow down, our local brand of fascism whenever one can.

The either/or situation between allying with US imperialism or allying with the Muslim far-right is intolerable. It is for the left to reclaim the lost terrain at international level, and, may I say, some credibility amongst the rank and file in Muslim-majority countries.

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P.S.

* "The European Left and the Muslim far-right. Understanding the Muslim far-right in Algeria, and beyond". From SIAWI, Friday 13 March 2015: http://siawi.org/article9168.html

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