

New Year's Eve in Cologne and elsewhere - Violences against Women, Tahrir squares in Europe: Euro centrism as a fig-leaf, and the art of conjuring in politics

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Facts

On New Year's Eve 2015, simultaneous coordinated sexual attacks took place against women in public space in about 10 cities, mostly in Germany, but also in Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland... Several hundred women, to this day, filed a case for sexual attack, robbery, and rape. These attacks were perpetrated by young men of migrant descent (be they immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, or other) from North Africa and the Middle East.

Unsurprisingly, reactions were: Dissimulation of facts, of their international coordination, of their magnitude for as long as could possibly be done, by governments, their police, and media, who sacrificed women's rights for social peace – as they mostly do. Preventive hullabaloo on the Left and among quite a number of feminists, in order to defend foreigners presumed to be 'Muslims' as potential victims of racism (please note the semantic shift from 'Arabs' or 'North Africans', as they were described in geographical terms by the attacked women and by the police, to 'Muslims'). Clamoring for more security measures on the Far Right and acting it out in Germany where took place a first indiscriminate pogrom against non-whites. Denial and racism: the usual responses, since the eighties, to the rise of far right Muslim fundamentalism in Europe.

Memories

At the heart of Tunis, a protest by secular feminists against Ben Ali: groups of young fundamentalists (there is evidence of their affiliation) surround the mostly women demonstrators, isolate them, attack them sexually, touch their sex and breasts, hit them violently, despite efforts to rescue them by male supporters who joined the meeting in solidarity. Police is watching.

Tahrir square, Cairo, the place where anti-government opposition meet: for the first time women in numbers take this opportunity to seize and exercise their citizenship rights; groups of young men (where they part of the Muslim Brotherhood or manipulated by them?) sexually molest hundreds of women demonstrators (and foreign journalists), press photos show some of them partly undressed, there are attempts to register cases of rape. The police too get at women demonstrators, beating them up, forcing 'virginity tests' upon them, etc. This policy of sexual terror will go on for months in Cairo, to the point that women's organizations develop an electronic emergency map of Cairo where attacks on women are registered in real time so that teams of male rescuers can get there in time.

An even older memory: Algiers, summer 1969, First Pan-African Cultural Festival: hundreds of women sit on the ground on the Main Post Office square which has been cleared of cars; they attend one of the many free public concerts that take place everyday from 5 pm to 4am, cultural dates that

women follow in masses; most of them wear the traditional white 'haïk' typical of Algiers region and they have brought many children too. At dusk around 8.30 pm, a rallying cry: 'en- nsa, l-ed-dar', 'women go home', chanted by hundreds of men who also came to attend the concert. Little group by little group, with much regret, women and children leave the square. Men, - triumphant, despising, - laugh at them. Nazis so defined women's place: 'church, kitchen and cradle'. Seven years after independence, the place assigned in public space to the celebrated revolutionary heroines of the glorious Algerian liberation struggle is now clearly defined. Patriarchy and fundamentalism, culture and religion, fly high together.

How strange that such links are not being made with the present attack, not even by feminists who supported women of Tahrir Square when they were attacked there?

It seems Europe cannot learn anything from us and that nothing that happens or happened in our countries can be of any relevance to what goes on in Europe. By definition. An underlying racism, never exposed in the radical Left, implicitly admits to an unbridgeable difference between civilized and under developed people, their behaviors, their cultures, their political situations. Under this essentialized otherness lies a hierarchy too shameful to mention: the radical Left's blind defense of 'Muslim' reactionaries, implicitly condones the belief that, for non-Europeans, a far right response is a normal one to a situation of oppression; clearly, we are not seen as capable of a revolutionary response. (I will not develop here how this belief is exported even to Left elites in Asia and Africa).

Cassandras that no one listens too, we have been yelling, screaming and howling for three decades, pointing at similarities that could have led to political enlightening. Algerian women especially, who fled fundamentalist terror in the nineties, pointed relentlessly to the similar steps taken in Algeria from the 70ies to the 90ies and in Europe and North America: attacks against legal rights of women (demanding specific 'Muslim' law in family matters, sex segregations in hospitals, swimming pools and elsewhere), together with communalist demands in education (a different cursus, non- secular), then targeted attacks on individuals who do not bend to these demands (girls being stoned, burnt to death) and on any secularist branded as kofr (journalists, actresses, Charlie), and finally indiscriminate attacks on anyone whose behavior does not fit with fundamentalist norms (Bataclan, café terraces. Football match, etc.) All of it developed along the same lines from the seventies till the nineties in Algeria, starting identically with targeting women's rights and their very existence in the public space: we know and they know as well that governments do not hesitate in trading women's rights for a form of social rest with fundamentalists.

However, the European Left seems incapable of distancing itself from its own situation where people of migrant descent, among whom presumed 'Muslims', do face discrimination. It extrapolates and exports its understanding of fundamentalists' rising to our own countries where 'Muslims' are neither a minority, no discriminated against - except by their own folks.

Even worse is the fact that the Left abandons to the sole political forces of the traditional Far Right the monopoly of the discourse on the other Extreme Right, that of Muslim fundamentalism; abandoning them in the same go the monopoly of the legitimate denunciation of the so-called religious right originating from our countries.

I fear, many of us fear, more and more, that this denial may lead to indiscriminate popular punitive actions: this indeed will satisfy both the desire for revenge of the traditional xenophobic extreme right, and the attempt by the fundamentalist extreme right to more largely recruit in Europe. We already witnessed attempts by extreme right mayors to legitimize the setting up of armed popular militia in order to 'protect' French citizens. Granted - the Left and the social democracy as well, regularly object to it, however, insofar as they refuse to confront Muslim fundamentalism and remain in denial, they de facto abandon the ideological terrain to the racist extreme right.

How to ignore the steps forward that fundamentalists have made in Europe? The recent brutal challenging of women's presence in public space on December 31st is only one more illustration of it... The distorting Eurocentric vision prevents from seeing similarities with what took place, for instance, in North Africa and the Middle East. In Europe, 'Muslims' are seen as victims, oppressed minorities - this apparently justifying any aggressive and reactionary behavior from them -, while just crossing a few borders would allow to appreciate the nature of their political program regarding democracy, secularists, believers in other religions, and women, when they are in a majority or when they come to power. Absence of political analysis is what allows their growth in Europe. Thanks to capitalist and xenophobic oppression in Europe, the fundamentalist extreme right is being white washed of its ultra reactionary policies, not just in Europe, but also in our countries of origin. Such a Eurocentric approach!

The fact that the Left and far too many feminists stick to the theory of priorities (the exclusive defense of people of migrant origin - re furnished as 'Muslims' - against the capitalist western right) is a deadly error that history will judge, and an abandonment of the progressive forces in and from our countries which absurd inhumanity will forever stain the banner of internationalism.

Another theory of priorities comes in and adds to the conceptual millstone that the Left carries about (the main enemy vs the secondary enemy), this one from human rights organizations: an implicit hierarchy of fundamental rights in which women's rights rank far behind minority rights, religious rights, cultural rights, just to name a few of those most often opposed to women's rights, including at the UN.

Since 9.11 in the USA and the security measures that followed, one witnesses a sleight of hand performed by human rights organizations and by the radical Left: conjuring away the cause to the benefit of the consequences. The main theme of analysis and debates is 'the war against terror', the undeniable and notorious abuses it engendered, the limitation of civil liberties, the fear for the future of democracy. (I will not debate here of the ground for these accusations, but I am only pointing at the methodology in use). All these themes are now prevalent in France, to combat the state of emergency that was adopted after the November attacks in Paris, and the fear that a Patriot Act of sorts could be developed in Europe.

Simultaneously, 'terror' itself is being 'disappeared' from the discourse, it loses reality, and it becomes just an illusion and a bogeyman for government's freedom-killing actions. Judging by the discourse, there is - indeed! - a 'war on terror', but there is no 'terror': it is only a fantasy of the xenophobic extreme right; there are indeed human bombs that explode in Paris, but there is no war in France... Endless elaborations take place on what government/s should not do, its intentions are denounced as perverse, manipulatory, detrimental to liberties. It is said that none of it is necessary for ensuring people's security. It is said that this constitutes a provocation to 'Muslims'.

A cause and a consequence system does now re- emerge, but in a reverse image. A traditional illusionist would bring the rabbit out of the hat in which it was made to disappear; but here we dig the hat out of the rabbit...

A worldwide phenomenon - the rise of a new brand of extreme right: i.e. Muslim fundamentalism - is not only justified but quite literally disappeared behind the critic of the reactions it engenders. Whatever our position may be regarding the nature and the actual deviation in these reactions, one should not allow for the phenomenon itself to be conjured away: in the real world, denial will not make it disappear, as it does in the discourse of the radical left and the human rights organizations.

To believe for one second that a worldwide political phenomenon could be determined by western capitalism and that only (whatever the regimes and forms of governments in which it emerges, the

stage of economic and cultural development in these countries, the classes and political forces in presence, etc...) is just being megalomaniac.

Throughout the past thirty years, burying one's head into the sand has not led to any halting in the growing demands made by the fundamentalist extreme right, neither in Europe nor anywhere else – far from that, fundamentalism surfed on the occultation of its political nature and on its cynical exploitation of democratic freedoms and of human rights.

What is at stake here goes far beyond women's rights; it is a project to establish a theocratic society in which, among many other rights, women's rights will be severely curtailed. The concerted action on 31.12, at European level, and its challenging of women's place in public space plays exactly the same role as the sudden invention of the so-called 'Islamic veil': it is a show of force and visibility.

This show of force may meet with success, as was to a large extent the enforcement on women of the 'Islamic veil'. The kind of advice given by some German authorities to the attacked women in Cologne attest to it: adjust to the new situation, stay away from men ('at arms length'), don't go out on your own, etc... In short, submit or pay the price for it. If anything happens to you, it will be your fault, you have been warned...

An advice that brings back to memory what used to be said in court, not so long ago, to women who were raped: why were you in such a place? At such a time? in such a dress?
An advice that Muslim fundamentalist preachers will definitely not disavow...

That the primary concern was to protect perpetrators and not to defend the victims is a variation on the usual defense of men's violence against women. To what extent is it a defense of patriarchy, or a defense of migrants, of ethnic or religious minorities? When the interests of patriarchy (that the Left does not dare defend officially anymore) merge with the noble defense of the 'oppressed' (their prestige, even on the Left, was somewhat damaged after the November attacks in Paris), it suits many people.

That questions could still be asked regarding the concerted nature of simultaneous attacks in at least 5 different countries and nearly a dozen cities in Europe, this leaves one speechless in wake of so much dishonesty, so much blindness or so much political perversity.

Marieme Helie Lucas

P.S.

* Siawi. Jan 5, 2016. Updated Jan 12:
<http://www.siawi.org/article10593.html>