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## GENDER

### GIRLS PLAY WITH CARS AND BOYS WITH DOLLS

#### EDITORIAL

**S**EX AND GENDER ARE OFTEN CONFUSED. SEX IS EASY TO DEFINE, since it is determined by biological and anatomical characteristics. Defining gender is a task that has provided sociologists and psychologists many a headache. It has been the subject of exhaustive debate, including a special United Nations session at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. It is generally accepted that gender concerns a set of qualities and behaviours expected from a male or female by society.

Gender attribution starts as soon as we are born, sometimes even earlier. Boys get their rooms painted blue; girls get theirs painted pink. As they get older little boys play with cars and guns, whereas little girls play house or play with dolls. When I was a young boy my parents gave me a doll. It could drink and had eyes that could blink. I still preferred to play with my toy cars and even though my parents forbade me to play with toy guns, I would manage to build them from sticks or Duplo bricks. Despite my parents efforts I had fallen into the traditional role of a young boy. How much does sex influence gender? Is it biological predisposition, the influence of the environment or merely personal rebellion? Whatever the reasons, it is inescapable that the roles male and female are expected to play are different.

Nevertheless, that is not to say that these roles are fixed and incapable of changing over time. In the past, necessity has been a catalyst for change. When the men went to war, it was imperative that the women take up their jobs. And when they returned, they were probably forced to re-evaluate their perspective on the distribution of tasks according to gender. The borders of gender roles in modern society are becoming increasingly blurred. Men are expected to do housework and women may be expected to provide for the family. These changes once again force people to reconsider the qualities they have attributed to each gender. As fathers stay home and take care of the children, the concept that they are not equally capable to raise them becomes absurd. As women succeed at high levels in competitive industries, the concept that they are too soft and not ruthless enough becomes ridiculous.

Although gender is a broad concept that includes the roles of both male and female, women are often in a more vulnerable situation which is why the gender issues discussed in this issue revolve mainly around the rights of women and gender equity. As Dorothy Allison, an award winning editor of several early feminist and Lesbian & Gay journals, says: "Class, race, sexuality, gender and all other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other need to be excavated from the inside." And this is what we aim to do. □

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## ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

A CONVERSATION WITH JOYCE OUTSHOORN

SHERIFA FULLER



**T**UESDAY WAS A TYPICAL DUTCH summer day. The morning was sunny but cold, there was a thunderstorm complete with torrential rains in the afternoon, and that evening around 6pm, I attended a pleasant outdoor barbecue with my friends.

That day I also had the chance to interview a rather unusual Dutch woman. I first met Dr Joyce Outshoorn when I was assigned to her class on political theories and analytical approaches at the University of Leiden. But I later discovered that her interests ran much wider than methods used to discuss the major events of the day.

Dr Outshoorn was born in Hilversum, the Netherlands, but spent her high school years in Zimbabwe, then still known as Rhodesia. She has been studying social and women's issues since 1972, when she wrote her doctoral thesis on the Dutch Social Democratic Party and its relation to women.

Since then she has taught at a number of prestigious political science faculties, including the University of Amsterdam and her current position at the University of Leiden. She has also chaired or directed several women's studies organizations, supervised numerous theses about women and politics and currently manages a number of networks dealing with women's issues ranging from prostitution to policymaking. With credentials like these, it's small wonder that when we were looking for candidates to interview for our issue on gender and development, Dr Outshoorn was the first person that came to mind.

### → | INTERVIEW

*“The symbolic importance of seeing women in government is so encouraging for women because it sets an ideal.”*

I was curious about women's issues, but in particular, issues faced by women in the developing world. What is the reason for the significantly higher poverty rates for women? How effective are measures aimed at gender equality?

Why do these issues seem to be discussed primarily in the industrialized world? Over the next hour, we discussed these issues and more.

*I'd like to ask you about paid and unpaid work. The common reasons why women in the developing world tend to be excluded from the paying sector are social roles, lack of education, influence of genetics on the female personality. How accurate do you think this perception is?*

Agriculture is the main work women engage in to produce food for their families, so it is important to look at to what degree agriculture is marketised [farming increasingly industrialised and for sale commercially]. When agriculture moves into the market, men push in and take over, which means that women carry out productive work, but do not get paid for it. In marketising economies, women also tend to have inflexible jobs [not governmentally recognised, but the only work available in the region], or informal work, also called “grey areas”

of work. So they do get paid, but not very much.

The way that social roles are embedded in the nuclear family is also important. From a very young age women are seen as the ones who must care for the family and household. In this way kinship networks also play a role in how much help women have in taking care of the nuclear family.

*Do you tend to find, then, that in societies where the extended family is very important, women are more able to work and to be active in the formal sector?*

That depends on the location and culture of people. In India there is often an extended family, but because young women marry into the family of their husbands, they take over the lion's share of the burden of cleaning and house-keeping. That is good for the mother-in-law.



In Latin America nuclear families are much more common: it is a very different family system. There, you often see that sisters, aunts, and grandmothers help out with the children, allowing women to migrate to find work as well.

So the shape of the kinship system and which tasks are done by who is also determined very much by the geographical and cultural context.

*But is it the case that there is something in women's nature that makes them less aggressive? And furthermore, if there are physically intense jobs that men can perform more easily, should we still be pursuing equal hiring practices?*

There are, of course, genetic differences between men and women, but there are more similarities than differences. The one difference on which there is wider agreement is that men tend to have more genes that lead to aggression. But then of course, the next question is to what extent is aggression necessary in order to be able to do jobs properly. Even in the case of soldiering, aggressiveness as such does not make good soldiers. In parts of Africa where I've lived, women do all the agricultural labour, and that is backbreaking work. Carrying water is extremely heavy and it is typically women's work in Africa and India. So, physical differences have never been the only reason why tasks are allotted the way they are.

As far as genetic explanations are concerned, in former times people would say, it's the rule of the Bible, or God, or Allah, or some other supernatural power; using genetic differences is the newest translation. So, there are genetic differences, but they do not justify the huge disparity or the huge discrimination that you see on the basis of gender.

*In a sense, traditional values can serve a function: to help people stay alive in the developing world. For instance, if a family is in a war zone and the woman goes out to work, that leaves the children vulnerable to be kidnapped into the army. So, should traditional values be changed in order to achieve goals of development and equal opportunity for women?*

In most countries when there is no state or police force or any institution offering protection the family serves such an essential function that it becomes really necessary for sustaining people's lives. In such a lawless situation, people do need their brothers and fathers as traditional fighters.

A person can only survive and get enough food when they function as a family, where there's a division of labour and people pool their resources.

In some societies, traditional institutions are eroding and the family is often the only hold that people still have. Unfortunately, I have become pessimistic because the erosion of the family which we have seen going on, driven by economic change and by war – which often has an economic basis as well – is progressing faster than the rise of new institutions. That is a discrepancy that I find worrying from the point of view of safeguarding people's lives.

On the other hand, things are changing. For instance, despite the very strong emphasis on the mother, especially in the Catholic countries in Latin America, women are migrating for work. It has become much more accepted for women to migrate to the cities or even travel across

the borders for work than it was twenty or thirty years ago.

Further, the general attitude towards reproductive rights is changing as well: despite the fact that ideals are not changing, women are seeing the opportunities which reproductive rights offer them, and they are incorporating them in their lives for their own purposes. This may not always be in ways that their men like, or governments like, or you and I like, but obviously women are feeling empowered by this because it enables them to do something about their home situation.

So from that point of view, values are changing, especially with the necessity and availability of work. "Necessity is the mother of invention," I think that is very true.



Angnolo Bronzino (1503-1572), *Lucrezia Panciatichi*.

*Many scholars argue that education and more work for women aid the development of the entire society. If this is the case why don't more development NGOs focus their resources on women, who are the key to this?*

It has been solidly proven that education of women will lead to lower disease rates, lower birth rates, and increased chances of employment. But it took a long time for gender experts and demographers, who were looking at the statistics, to convince those giving development aid that this was the case. They thought that large-scale projects, like building dams, were the key.

There is also a huge patriarchal resistance because the linchpin to the argument is reproductive rights: giving women a



means of control of their fertility and their sexuality. And I think that is one of the mainstays of patriarchy. So there is resistance not only among development workers but also among governments and international programs.

Fortunately, the link between improving women's lives and improving social welfare has become established through various UN population conferences, particularly the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. People are beginning to realize that to lower the fertility rate and to alleviate poverty, women have to be educated.

*But there are valid reasons for not focusing on women: nations who have to prioritise because they are at war or because they are fighting the spread of disease, may not consider women's issues. Can it be argued that these governments are just doing the best they can within the political reality?*

At the level of the individual, also known as the micro-level, the argument does make sense. If you are really concerned about staying alive, you do not have the time or the resources to attend to these issues.

At the level of the state, or at the macro level, I do not think so. When human rights are disregarded, child labour, or women's rights, development cannot proceed properly because a number of really important angles are missing. If you are not going to take into account the human perspective, whom are you doing it for? If to the government concentrates on stopping the fighting in combat zones and does not take into account the human factors, there will not be peace anyway. It needs to be part and parcel of the same policy. And you cannot isolate the one aspect from the other.

*Can you explain briefly what gender mainstreaming is?*

It is the idea that taking the gender angle into account should be part of regular public policy. It should be in the perspective of regular policymaking: not that it should be done by a sort of special gender official, but that it should be done by people normally charged with developing, deciding and implementing policy.

That is the Council of Europe definition which is most prevalent in Europe, and which fed into the platform of action in Beijing.

*Do you think that gender mainstreaming addresses issues of discrimination and misperceptions keeping women out of the formal working sector? How widely is the policy implemented?*

Gender mainstreaming has been in effect for the past ten years, but at the moment it seems to be developed at the

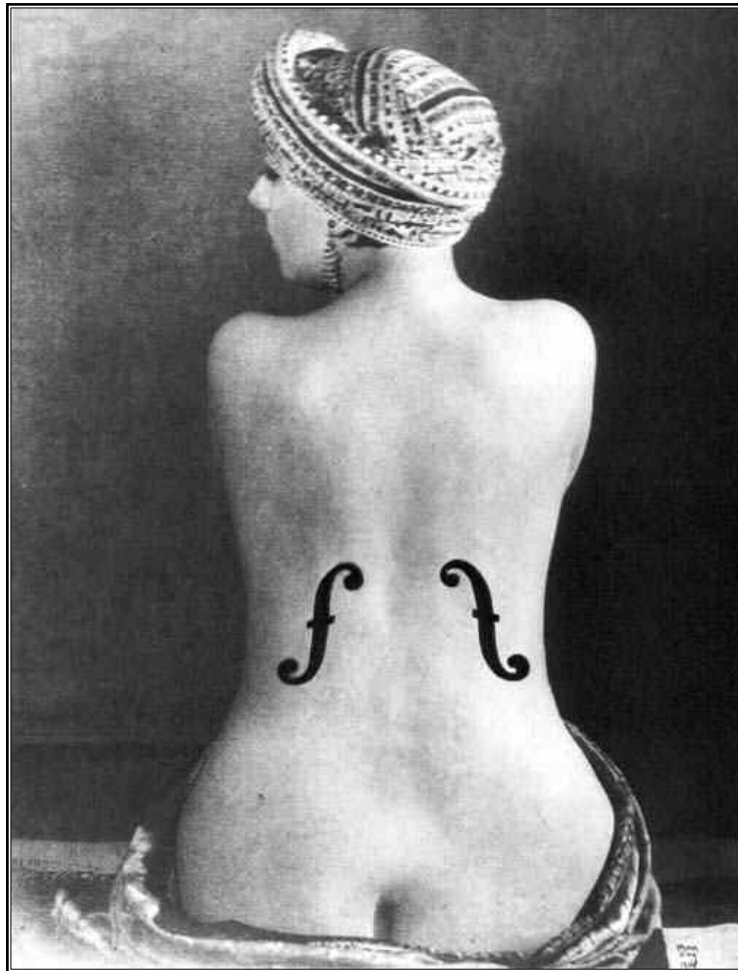
cost of more specific programs aimed at women. It is becoming a sort of excuse not to develop any specific programs aimed at women, an alibi. If a person really wants to improve the situation of women, then it is best to follow both strategies. If everyone is supposed to be taking care of the issue then no one is taking responsibility. That is the danger with gender mainstreaming.

A great example of this lack of specific programming is the funding for AIDS treatment. A lot of major AIDS programs are not targeting women enough. Yet as the ones that get pregnant, they are more likely to develop AIDS than men are and they pass it on to their babies, whether in the womb or through breast

feeding. It has been very difficult to convince certain development NGOs that you specifically need to target young women who are getting pregnant, and not just focus on the migrant male workers who spread the disease.

The AIDS conversation also crosses over with the debate about using condoms and reproductive choice. There are also political reasons against this type of education. For example, the US government, which supplies a lot of money for the AIDS programs, was against spreading condoms because it goes against the Moral Majority, a powerful, religious lobbying group in the United States, so that is another factor that needs to be reckoned with.

*Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in government at 50%. And in general, the rewritten constitutions have provisions to assure more women are involved in the government. Do you think it actually helps the women that live in the country to have more female representatives?*



Man Ray (1890-1976), *Le violon d'Ingres (Kiki)*.



Rwanda is a very specific case: they took the opportunity to make the parliament fifty-fifty, which means that there were women pushing for that, otherwise it would not have happened. But there is always a gap between the people doing the representing and the supporters. This is not a specific problem for women: it is a general problem in any representative democracy.

Having said that, the symbolic importance of seeing women in government is so encouraging for women, and especially for young girls, because it sets an ideal.

Women also make substantive changes. Through research, we see that the more women in the government, especially across political parties, the more likely changes will occur because women are more likely than men to take up women's issues.

One of my colleagues has done research on the membership of an old system of advisory bodies for the government in the Netherlands and sent questionnaires to two thousand members. None of the women surveyed were chosen to participate in the survey because they were women, but they were actually the ones who were gendering the work of the advisory committee. Even though they were not selected for their feminist or gender expertise, once they were in, they were actually gaining expertise and pursuing gender issues. So we thought, "Hey, this is like sort of a Trojan horse." Get them in and it is more likely that the job gets done.

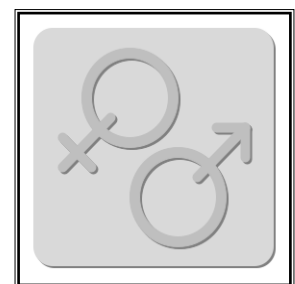
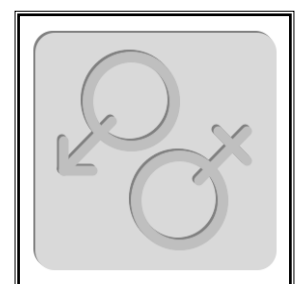
*Do you see any changes in the future for women in the developing world? Why or why not?*



Andy Warhol (1928-1987), *Marilyn Monroe*.  
Photo courtesy of the Warhol Museum,  
Michener Art Museum.

I see huge changes, but one should differentiate between various countries because many have different rates of development. Patriarchy is still very strong in parts of Asia like Cambodia and Vietnam for example. Change there has taken place in the context of an authoritarian state with the patriarchal from of the family very much intact: they could adapt to the new economic situation and retain the old social order.

In other countries economic development has actually taken place in either a weak state or a democratic state and also in the situation where patriarchal power was already falling apart such as in Chile, Argentina and Brazil. That gives much better opportunities to women. On the whole I am inclined to optimism. And I think the momentum of change has become such that it is going to be hard to stop. ■





## FEMINIST ETHICS. A NEW MORALITY?

MAKI KO HIROMI

**W**OMEN AND MEN ARE OFTEN PERCEIVED AS BEING diametrically opposed, with different characteristics, different values, and even fundamentally different ways of thinking. Men are supposedly aggressive, independent and logical, while women are altruistic and gentle. Women and men have thus been brought up to respond to moral questions differently, although society often seems to place more value on the “masculine” approach. Some claim that this is precisely what causes gender inequality. Is this truly the case? Or are the two sets of standards “separate but equal”? If this is the root of all the problems, should the “feminine” values and ways solving problems be given greater public attention, or should men acquire more of the traits valued in women? Should women adopt more “masculine” qualities? Are there really such things as “feminine” and “masculine” traits?

These questions, asked since the 18th century and throughout the women’s rights movement, are still very pertinent today. Feminist Ethics is a lesser-known yet controversial answer to these questions and to the remaining problems in gender equity. As a general term, it refers to all theories of ethics that focus on the so-called “feminine experience” and posit a women-centred view of morality, in contrast with the male-centric traditional view. Feminist Ethicists believe that this alternative ethic will lead to greater gender equity through a leveling of the moral playing field, and to the empowerment of women.

Feminist ethics’ primary claim is that the male-centred ethical system currently used and taught in the public sphere does not adequately reflect the moral experiences of women. It claims that the “masculine world” of business and politics focuses on rights and rules, contracts and obligations, reason and independence. These are the tools needed to succeed in the competitive public world, and men are better equipped with the moral values necessary to tackle it. The values sought and applied more in the private sphere such as generosity, kindness, gentleness, modesty and altruism, however, are more prominent in

women. Proponents of feminist ethics do not necessarily make any claims as to whether this is an innate difference between the genders or if the different values have been cultivated in us through societal expectations. Instead,

they simply maintain that this is the social reality. Traditional western ethics places greater value on the virtues associated with men when the two conflict. Therefore, women tend to be considered less morally developed or less capable of making rational and just decisions. The exception is when women take on the “masculine” traits; however, in doing so they may be giving up or hiding part of their identity, and may suffer criticism for not being womanly enough. This, they claim, is unacceptable oppression of women and inherently unequal, regardless of whether or not the discrimination is deliberate. Women must be able to be themselves without fear of criticism or marginalisation.

In order to achieve this end, feminine morality must be shown to be equally rational and effective as traditional ethical systems, if not more so. One normative system proposed as an alternative by thinkers such as the American

ethicist Carol Gilligan places its focus on care for others and relationships instead of on justice and rights. In this system, referred to as *ethics of care*, something is right because of the benefit it yields to someone we care about, whether that be on a very personal level or just because of a general concern for humanity. Such a system would encourage people to not sue for anything more than actual loss and damages, to sacrifice some personal profit to keep another’s business from going under, and to donate both time and money to charitable causes. Ethics of care also implies that it is not enough to take the proscribed course of action; one must also act with good intent.

Another system using the relationship between mother and child as the paradigm of interpersonal interaction has been suggested by Sara Ruddick, among others. Ruddick notes that mothers love their children unconditionally and will go to great length to protect their lives, personal growth and happiness. They argue that if this attitude were extrapolated into public life the world would be a

## ◆ I OPINION

“Women must be able to be themselves without fear of criticism or marginalisation.”



much more peaceful place. Mothers, for example, might have an entirely different attitude toward capital punishment, viewing the individual not as a criminal deserving death, but as the unique child of another mother, gone down the wrong path.

As things stand now, those making decisions such as in the examples above would be dismissed as irrational, too emotional, or impractical. The two normative systems have been proposed as better reflecting the ethical experience of women, showing that they are both pragmatic and rational as well as being socially desirable. So desirable that its advocates claim that, not only should women be given greater appreciation for holding such values, but men would also be bettered by taking on some (or all!) of their attitudes. These changes to the traditional ethical system would address the problem of gender inequality by placing men and women on an equal moral starting point. Women will no longer be automatically considered morally inferior.

Such a controversial proposal incites great criticism. Some dispute the proposed normative claims, saying that feminine ethics and values are already a part of the traditional system and that masculine virtues are valued more because that is the way it should be. The “masculine” virtues are more important because they define the moral course of action, while the “feminine” virtues simply define the proper attitude one should take to make one a truly good person. They claim that the source of gender disparity is not in the ethical system, but in the different ways in which men and women are educated morally. Others argue that while it may be true that care and motherly love are under-appreciated and may be a better model for interpersonal relationships, no personal relationship can serve as a model for a theory of ethic that can be applied to all of society. Each relationship has different qualities and virtues that are pertinent for that relationship and different considerations must be made for strangers, as opposed to loved ones. In addition, no relationships between those in unequal positions (such as mother and child) should serve as a model for relationships between equals, or vice versa.

Some believe that Feminist Ethics is in itself a bad idea, even if we set aside the problems with the normative systems. In promoting an ethical system based on only one aspect of life, it may be making the same mistake made by traditional male-centric ethical systems. Furthermore, many believe that ethics should be universal and cannot depend on perspective, gender, or any other category. While it may be true that “feminine” virtues have been undervalued and some corrective surgery on society may be necessary (although this is also disputed), critics believe that the change should not be nearly as drastic as proposed. “Feminine” virtues should be more recognized, but women should still develop “masculine” virtues for work in the public sphere and expect to

be judged accordingly. Critics aver that allowing two moralities to exist or replacing traditional ethics with Feminist Ethics would be too great of an overthrow of our beliefs and would be more harmful than beneficial.

Feminist Ethics seems to have some very good points, but I find myself unable to agree with it. I am sympathetic to the claim that different moral expectations are made of the two genders, and that fulfilling the expectations made of women make them less likely to succeed in many realms of public life. Society seems to prefer its women gentle, kind, and charitable. Many men prefer to be more powerful than their wives. At the same time, such “feminine” qualities are valued less than “masculine” ones, and women today are also expected to be educated and have successful careers, donning an aggressive “masculine” persona while conducting business. Essentially, women are asked to juggle two personalities – one for personal life and another for business. Men, on the other hand, get away with using one for both. I can certainly see why some would be offended

at the suggestion that women are less morally developed, since more seems to be expected of them.

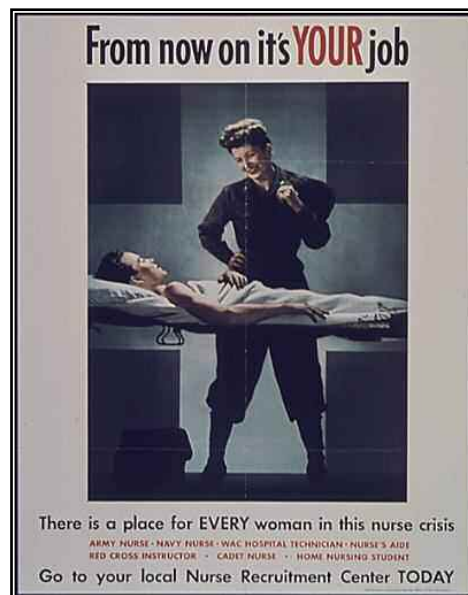
Nevertheless, I question whether there really are such things as “feminine” traits and “masculine” traits. Certainly, there are qualities that have historically been sought more in one gender than the other. Yet the large number of men who display “feminine” qualities and women who hold “masculine” virtues leads me to believe that perhaps the differences between the genders is socially constructed and not part of their inherent natures.

Moreover, I am convinced that an alternative ethical system for women is not the answer, nor is attempting to make men more like women. Both answers seem

like nothing more than easy ways out – ways in which people can continue to be judged mainly only by a certain number of the virtues and not be held accountable by every standard.

All of humanity has the capacity to overcome these distinctions and be virtuous in all ways. To be gentle yet firm, sympathetic yet rational. I believe we have it in us to find the right balance – the *universally* right balance. To know when to sacrifice profit for the sake of kindness and altruism and to know when we must hurt someone we care about for a greater good. The worlds of business and politics do not have to be as full of rivalry, hatred, greed and self interest as they are today, but at the same time mothers may need to accept that sometimes even children must be sacrificed for a greater cause.

Why settle for half, when we can have it all?



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## THE HIJĀB

DO TRADITIONS HINDER WOMEN IN MODERN SOCIETY?

SARA HUSSEINI

**I**N TODAY'S GLOBALISED SOCIETY, WHERE DIFFERENT CULTURES and ethnicities come into contact on a regular basis and external religiosity is reported to be increasing, the question concerning the prominence of religious and cultural traditions in modern society is becoming ever more critical. The *hijāb*, as a practice which is only adopted by women, as well as being one of the most externally obvious religious-cultural signs, provides an interesting case for discussion.

In 2001 the Canadian organisation Women Working with Immigrant Women (WWIW) documented the experiences of Muslim women applying for jobs in manufacturing, services and sales. One participant tells her story: *"I did an interview by phone for an office-cleaning job. I got the job. I arrived and asked what I should do. The next day my supervisor talked to me about that thing I was wearing on my head. I corrected her and told her it's called hijāb. I told her it was my religion; I had to wear it. The supervisor told me that some people feel uncomfortable to ask me about it. I wanted to talk to a higher supervisor. He never talked to me and they never addressed my issue. Then my supervisor followed me around and started harassing me. After a week I quit. It's not worth it."*

The word *hijāb* commonly refers to the traditional headscarf and long dress worn by many Muslim women, but also has broader meanings encompassing the values of modesty, privacy and morality. Its original name, as written in the Qur'an, is *khimār*, it was not until later that the word *hijāb*, from the root *hajaba* meaning to 'veil' or 'screen', was introduced. The main Qur'anic basis for the practice of *hijāb* can be found in the *surat an-Nur* 24:31:

*"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their sons, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, or their brothers' sons or their sisters' sons, or their women or the servants whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex, and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments."*

Following the standard interpretation of this verse by Islamic scholars the *hijāb* is usually adopted at puberty, but this is not a fixed rule; indeed there is debate as to whether it is obligatory (*fard*) in Islam, or merely recommended (*mustahabb*), which is why not all Muslim women choose to wear it. If

adopted, the *hijāb* is worn in public at all times, but not around close family members or other women.

In the last few years this garment has caused debate and controversy in countries such as Iran, Turkey, and Nigeria, among others. It has resulted in laws banning religious symbols from public schools in France and Belgium, and even in parts of Germany, where eight out of the sixteen federal States have recently adopted a similar policy. Meanwhile, Muslim women in a range of countries- and by no means only in the West- have complained of discrimination in employment and of increased discrimination in all areas of life since the events of 9/11 and the London bombings of July 2005.

The *hijāb*, in one respect, is clearly a gender issue, although disagreement about wearing it in the workplace forms part



Woman with hijāb. Photo courtesy of [www.333cn.com](http://www.333cn.com).



of a wider religious, cultural, and ethnic issue in modern society. Currently, the legislation in some European nations bans *all* religious symbols, including the Jewish *kippah* (skull cap) and the Christian cross, in public schools and some other government-run institutions. The UK-based British Airways requires their staff to wear crosses underneath their clothing, and allows Muslim women to wear the *hijāb* only because there is no way to hide it. Male Sikhs have also experienced problems with the turban they are required to wear for religious purposes; currently the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in the US is suing the finance company Merrill Lynch for discrimination against a man based solely on his Muslim faith and

them a sense of identity and show openly that they are Muslim. Many women have said that they like to be judged on personality rather than on looks, and some simply felt that the *hijāb* made them more focused in life. Whatever the reasons for wearing the *hijāb*, most Muslim women are keen to stress that it is not the sign of oppression which many non-Muslims perceive it to be. The overwhelming sense that one gets from reading literature on this subject is that *misunderstanding* is the biggest problem engendering discrimination and antagonism towards the practice. What is needed, it seems, is education.

By unveiling myths, raising awareness, increasing understanding, and altering misperceptions, the NGO community



Iranian origin. There is strong evidence that many of the arguments about wearing garments with symbolic value in public are not targeted specifically at Muslims, but at manifestations of religion in general.

One suggestion of how to deal with this *hijāb* issue is that it be removed in the public sphere, particularly in jobs which involve daily contact with the general population. This rule, already enforced in some nations, is supported not only by secularists but even by religious leaders who are concerned by the discrimination faced by Muslim women. One such singular supporter was the former Chairman of the Council of Mosques and Imams in Britain, Zaki Badawi, who advised Muslim women to remove their head scarves for their own safety after the backlash created by the London bombings in 2005. The general response of most Muslim women was to refuse to compromise their religious beliefs, arguing that by not continuing to lead their normal lives, as every other Londoner was advised to do, they too would be granting victory to terrorism. The predominant feeling among Islamic women in Britain is very much that the *hijāb* is an individual right, and should remain so.

Most Muslim women complain of having to explain themselves continuously, clarifying that for the vast majority, the *hijāb* is a personal choice to do with modesty and respect, worn primarily for religious reasons, but often also for a number of cultural and personal reasons too. For instance, some feel that a lot of Muslim men prefer to marry a woman who wears the *hijāb*; others wear the *hijāb* to give

can begin to break down these barriers of intolerance and discrimination. There are already efforts being made by a number of organizations worldwide, from small student groups like one at the University of Leicester (UK) which organized an event in 2006 to improve understanding of the *hijāb*, to larger projects such as an ad campaign ran by the New York Times in 2003, or the aforementioned study carried out by the WWIW in 2001. Further projects could involve after-school or weekend activities for children and their parents, whereby women who wear the *hijāb* talk to people and inform them about the practice. At the same time they could organise and participate in a range of sports and cultural activities, in order to show that the *hijāb* is not something to be feared, that it is merely a way of dressing that reflects a certain way of life. This sort of education could and should cover all forms of religious, cultural and ethnic discrimination: A desperately needed large and long-term project that the NGO community certainly has the resources, knowledge and capabilities to undertake. ■

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## WHERE WOMEN GROW

## EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE THIRD SECTOR

CELIA H. THORHEIM

**N**ON-GOVERNMENTAL, NON-PROFIT, CHARITABLE AND volunteer organisations have successfully acquired central roles in the international system, and now participate in the process of decision-making and development in nearly all parts of the world. These organisations are referred to as the *Third Sector* of the economy and are recognized as important players along with the institutions in the public and the private sectors. The organisational structures of the EU and the UN clearly reflect this development: both take measures to include the participation of NGOs through various forums and committees. As a consequence, Third Sector organizations frequently influence the actions and decisions of institutions such as governments and multinational corporations through direct consultations, indirect pressure or lobbying. Power to influence and promote change is no longer centred only among those with economic and political power, but is increasingly in the hands of the organised “masses”. This new allocation of power has had a significant effect on society and has attracted large amounts of interest and research. Literature on the subject is often focused on the positive effects this phenomenon has had on the spread of democracy, third world social development, and the empowerment of civil society and marginalized groups.

Women, as a group, are often empowered through the Third Sector. Not only are they targeted to be the beneficiaries of aid from NGOs, but they are also frequently employees in the organisations *per se*. According to a recent survey by the British Equal Opportunities Commission, women make up more than seventy percent of the work force in the sector, a rather high proportion when compared to the public and private ones. From a global perspective, this could be because women’s involvement is enhanced as states become more democratic and extend civil liberties to all groups of society. Also, their ability to pressure and influence more prosperous and

powerful actors increases as women are given more freedom to congregate and express their opinions. Furthermore, the advancements in communication technology have undoubtedly accelerated this process. In this case, the term *empowerment* refers to the fact that women

today, more than before, are able to affect the outcome of bureaucratic and non-transparent political and social processes on the local, national and international level.

This does not shed light on why so many women – compared to men – choose to work in the Third Sector, especially since they are still under-represented in the private sector. If women are given equal opportunities to men by law, why isn’t the division of labour more even across the sectors in practice? One would assume a more balanced distribution in the developed world, but this is not the case. It may be because women find the Third Sector more in line with their interests and ambitions than men do. Some scholars maintain that women are more naturally focused on “soft” issues such as education, environment, health, children and poverty relief, and would therefore prefer the less competitive and aggressive surroundings of non-profit work. Or, it could be that

women would be just as content to work in the private sector, but still find themselves somewhat excluded from it due to high competitiveness.

It would be interesting to discover the reasons that contribute to the concentrated involvement of females in the Third Sector, which relates to the question of whether it really is a sign of deliberate empowerment or rather, if it is an indication that women are still not considered to be equally capable as men when it comes to working in the other sectors. Most likely it is a combination of both factors. Certainly, women have on several occasions had to venture into the Third Sector to reach their goals in absence of alternate channels of influence and, by doing so, have ended up increasing their knowledge, skills and power. After the fall of the Soviet regime the processes of

## ● | IN BRIEF

“Women are empowered by the Third Sector, but at the same time they help empower the sector as a whole.”



democratisation and privatisation led to a social marginalisation of women in the former communist republics. Politics and business became relatively riddled with corruption and patriarchy, which not only reduced female participation but also shifted the focus away from the “soft” issues. To counter this, women formed groups based on volunteer participation, and as they became more numerous and stronger, they were again able to put pressure on the public and private sectors to increase the rights of women and children. Today NGOs in these countries have, to a large extent, become a part of the political system and women have gained more credibility as capable participants in the areas of business and politics as well.

This suggests that women do perhaps have more of an interest in soft issues than men. But also that social exclusion forces them to make use of Third Sector methods of influence even though they could just as well reach their goals in the public and private sectors if these were more accessible. It is reasonable to assume that women could achieve as much – if not more – progress on the soft issues by aiming for high profile positions in politics and business. Nevertheless, it seems that the traditional gender roles of men and women enhance the likelihood of women ending up in the Third Sector. To some degree, even women in the modernised world are still expected to take care of home and family, while men are supposed to be the main breadwinners. This means the competitive and high paid jobs of the private sector which demand long hours over many years are more accessible to men, while the Third Sector, which offers volunteer work and more flexible positions fit better with the “traditional” role of the female. Such a view does not take into account individual traits or ambitions, but many employers still tend to base their hiring decisions on this type of reasoning.

In part, this could explain why women are frequently unable to break through the “glass ceiling” which is separating them from the top managerial positions. According to the survey mentioned above, even in the Third Sector, where women make up the majority, men hold more than half of the leadership positions. One would think that if women chose to work in the Third Sector simply because it better suits their interest areas and abilities, the proportion

of female leaders would match the total percentage of women in the sector. The skewed gender distribution cannot be attributed solely to the employers. Women seem to be more reluctant than men to join the competition for the higher paying jobs. It has been claimed that this stems from genetic differences between men and women, referring to the assumption that men are naturally more aggressive and ambitious than women. This does not automatically make them more capable of managing organizations in the private sector, but it seems to make them more comfortable with receiving praise for their efforts and also with praising themselves. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to understate their talents and experiences. Another theory is that women still conform to traditional social gender roles. Whichever is more accurate, the outcome is just the same; women in general tend to stay in lower level jobs with lower wages regardless of which sector they work in.

If seen over a period of time, however, the situation today differs greatly from only a few decades ago. Women are increasingly striving for leadership positions in all sectors, and the female ratio in the private sector and in politics is rising. The expansion of the Third sector has undoubtedly contributed to this development. Whether it is due to necessity or interest, women use the available resources to establish new organizations or join others, and then use their acquired skills to further enhance the importance and influence of the sector. Hence, women are empowered by the Third Sector, but at the same

time they help empower the sector *as a whole*. Furthermore, women with backgrounds from non-profit work also move on to positions in the other sectors and thereby attain more political and economic power. The higher female ratio in the Third Sector could simply be a necessary step on the way to more recognition and equality in society in general; a step that women need to make use of actively. □





## VOLUNTEER PROFILE

### SUMMER INTERNS

SHERIFA FULLER ~ MAKIKO HIROMI ~ SARA HUSSEINI ~ CELIA THORHEIM

**I**T IS A BUSY SUMMER AT SPANDA FOUNDATION'S HEAD office: four interns have joined the organisation for the summer and are working hard to keep Spanda's various projects flowing. The four friends are a prime example of the international experience readily available here in The Hague.

Sara Hussein is a twenty-four year old British Palestinian. She would like to work in the field of interfaith and intercultural relations, so she decided to dedicate her vacation to work with Spanda. Sara took up languages in secondary school and pursuing this course of study she eventually earned a BA in German Studies and History from Birmingham University. Sara developed an interest in her Arab roots, which led her to enrol in a Master's in Islamic Studies. She completed the Master's with a dissertation on Christian-Muslim Relations in 2006. Diploma in hand, she flew to the Middle East where she stayed in Jordan and Lebanon studying Arabic and spending time with her father's family, who are of Palestinian origin. Integrating into the culture was easy for her and she suffered no culture shock despite having been born and raised in the United Kingdom because she had visited her family in the Middle East every holiday. Sara acknowledges that there are problems between the Western world and the Middle East, but believes that this sharp division between East and West is essentially a mental construct that has been exacerbated by the media, to the extent that it is now becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. She adds that people are more interested in bad news; the story of a Christian getting along well with his Muslim neighbour is not considered newsworthy.

Sara is currently applying for a PhD, and would like to work on interfaith education in the future. She would like to develop an after-school programme that allows children from different cultures, faiths and backgrounds to interact informally, while also having access to an educator who could talk to the children about topics ranging from the difference in belief systems to the importance of tolerance.

At Spanda, Sara is researching possible topics to be addressed by the *Tea for Peace* series. She enjoys living in the Netherlands and loves The Hague, particularly the old buildings and cafes.

Sherifa Fuller has a different opinion. The twenty-four year old Californian has been living in Leiden (The Netherlands) for the past year, pursuing a Master's in International Relations and Diplomacy. The programme is going well: "All the teachers love me," she says, laughing.

Sherifa graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a degree in Political Science. She grew to love Los Angeles, where you can find a little bit of everything. After completing her degree, Sherifa struggled for a couple of months to find a job in politics and instead took an administrative position at the UCLA purchasing department. It was not what she wanted to do, but she was able to pay her bills and get healthcare for a year and a half. She was close to landing a coveted job with the United States government, but at the same time she was offered a place at Leiden University. Since she knew that she probably would never study abroad once she started working, she decided that this would be a once in a lifetime experience and enrolled in Leiden University. It also allowed Sherifa to learn more about her culture and her mother's family, who had immigrated to the Netherlands from Suriname.

Although she had trouble adjusting to Dutch culture, Sherifa is still enjoys her adventure in Europe: she travels frequently and spends time with her friends and family. In addition, she loves the cultural and ethnic diversity of the country and has interacted with different nationalities.

When Sherifa finishes her Master's she will return to the United States where she would like to work for the US government, either in the State Department or the US Agency for International Development. She hopes to do a job that would enable her to be in permanent contact with the people she is working for and where she would see the results of her field of work.

She found Spanda while searching for possible places to undertake an internship as a part of her degree and now manages and updates the *Tea for Peace* blog.

Makiko Hiromi is the youngest of the Spanda interns. The twenty-two year old was born in Switzerland, but has the Japanese nationality. After one year, her family moved to the United States, where she lived until the age of eleven. Then they moved to Japan where she had to adjust to a completely different school system until she was accepted to a private school with a bilingual program with most of the classes conducted in English.

Makiko decided to go back to the US when the time came to apply to college. She was more fluent in English than Japanese and she felt more affinity with the American lifestyle and culture. Not sure which field of study she would like to pursue, the flexibility of education in the US offered her the best choice, since in Japan you have to choose all your courses in advance. She took a course on



ethics at an academic summer camp and had to pose difficult questions and ponder the answers. She enjoyed the challenge and saw philosophy as a way to get a step closer to the unattainable truth, and therefore chose to pursue it at Duke University in North Carolina.

This year, Makiko received a grant to explore internship opportunities abroad and decided to volunteer in Europe, because she had very little experience with the region and could travel in the weekends. Spanda gave her the opportunity to gain experience in the not-for-profit sector. In fact, she is so interested in this field that she is thinking of dedicating a year to it after she graduates from Duke.

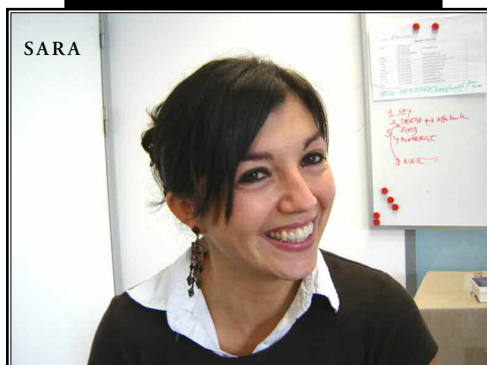
So far, Makiko has managed to visit Berlin, Prague and Bruges and plans to explore Italy and Greece. If circumstances permit, she still hopes to make it to Paris and Dublin. Of all the cities she visited Berlin stood out the most. There, she saw the places where the momentous decisions were made that influenced the lives of so many, including people she knows personally.

As for the future, Makiko wants to either work on law for the not-for profit sector or on a medical ethics board. She is plans to do a joint Law and Philosophy degree and might pursue post-baccalaureate studies in Applied Ethics.

Celia Thorheim is also not so sure about which kind of professional career she wants. The twenty-five year old Norwegian from Ålesund sees equal merit in working for either the government or the private sector.

She is pursuing a Master's in International Relations and Diplomacy at Leiden University, and was introduced to Spanda by her classmate: Sherifa. At the office, Celia writes for the newsletter, works on fund raising and helps with the planning of the *Tea for Peace* event.

In 2003, Celia completed her bachelor's degree in Economics and Marketing at Ålesund University College, after spending the



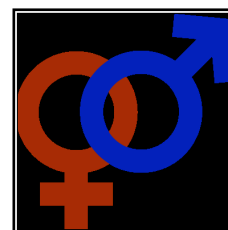
last semester of the programme in Bangkok. The experience was unforgettable. Apart from learning some Thai, Celia fell in love with the local way of life and the Buddhist culture. She found the laid back and relaxed culture in the middle of a big bustling city a fascinating mix.

Her interest in international politics sprung forth from the classes she took on political economy and Southeast Asian relations in Bangkok. Her first degree in economics was a natural choice, as her hometown is a commercial hub. While she enjoyed the subject, it is not something that she would like to do full-time.

Celia was eager to discover more about the culture that she had first experienced in Bangkok, so she spent the following year travelling in Southeast Asia and Australia. Upon her return to Norway in 2004 she enrolled in a Bachelors programme in Comparative Politics at the University of Bergen, which she completed in just two years. Her wanderlust seized her once more and while searching for possibilities to do a Master's degree abroad, she came across Leiden University.

Celia finds the Dutch culture very similar to that of Norway – “Nothing special,” she says. However she still likes it and enjoys the international environment.

In a year, her Master's programme in Leiden will be finished and she is considering a return to Norway, this time to Oslo. On the other hand, travelling continues to be a possibility: there is still a lot of the world out there for her to discover. ■





## NEWSROOM

### SPANDA



#### JUBILO

A COMPARATIVE APPROACH  
TO JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC REALITIES

TEA FOR PEACE

**T**EA FOR PEACE WILL BE LAUNCHED 3 SEPTEMBER 2007 at the Het Nutshuis, in The Hague, at 17.30. Before that happens, Spanda has started a blog for the event. There you can find all news and updates concerning the event. You can also find some suggestions for articles and calls to debate on the matter. This is definitely an address to be added to your favourites. <http://teaforpeace.blogspot.com>.



UN

#### UN CALLS FOR MALE INVOLVEMENT IN MATERNITY

On the World Population Day, 11 July, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the Director Executive of the UN Population Fund Thoraya Ahmed Obaid appealed for a more male participation in maternity. This involvement would reduce death rates of women when giving birth and would ensure a safer motherhood.

Mr Ban stated: "As partners for maternal health, men can save lives." He also asked men to become "partners and agents for change".

Ms. Obaid added that "experience shows that male involvement can make a substantial difference when it comes to preserving the health and lives of women and children."

The World Population Day intends to put the importance of population issues in focus. Currently more than half a million women die each year during their pregnancy or while giving birth. 99% of these victims are from developing countries.



#### BAN KI-MOON APPEALS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION FOR MIGRANT'S PLIGHT

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon asked for "effective action without delay" for what he calls "one of the great global challenges of our century": the plight of 200 million migrants in world.

According to Mr Ban, migrants are driven by "age-old pursuit of a better life, as well as by increasingly understood phenomena such as climate change." And he added that the developed world can gain from migration phenomena, stating that "their cultures, values and traditions not only enrich our societies, but enable us to adapt successfully to a world that is growing fast."



#### UN AND SUDAN CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT ABANDONMENT OF CHILDREN

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Sudanese authorities are carrying out a campaign to prevent the abandonment of children and to provide temporary lodging for them at families as an alternative to orphanages and similar institutions.

In 2003, a study revealed that a hundred newborns were being abandoned in Khartoum every month. The numbers urged the government and the UNICEF to initiate a pilot programme that favours the placement of abandoned children in family homes. Since then some five hundred families have come forward to host these children. The idea is based on the Islamic system of *kaffala*, which proclaims that the community should help in the wellbeing of vulnerable children.

While the child is being taken care of by a temporary family, the social workers will try to trace down the biological parents of the infant and attempt reunification. For those children who cannot be reunited with their parents, the programme has identified a number of permanent families willing to take them in.

UNICEF states that there is much evidence concerning the improvement of the child's growth when placed with an alternative family. These include growth in language and social development.

Now the campaign unites an initiative to prevent abandonment and the pilot programme by closely working together with midwives, community leaders and families.



The launch coincided with the closure of the Khartoum's orphanage. Since the beginning of the programme more than 2,500 children were displaced from the institution to family homes.



# UNICEF EXCITED OVER EGYPT'S MOVES TO STOP FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

UNICEF is supporting Egyptian authorities in their moves to stop Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which affects three million girls and women in Africa every year, according to estimates from the agency. The country had declared that only medical professionals could practise the cutting, however the death of a 12-year old girl after the procedure has made the Minister of Health and Population to fully criminalise FGM.

Egypt's First Lady, Suzanne Mubarak, is campaigning against FGM in an effort to eliminate the practice in full and to amend child laws in the country. The UNICEF representation in Egypt has stated that such amendment would allow people to report on those who persist with FGM.

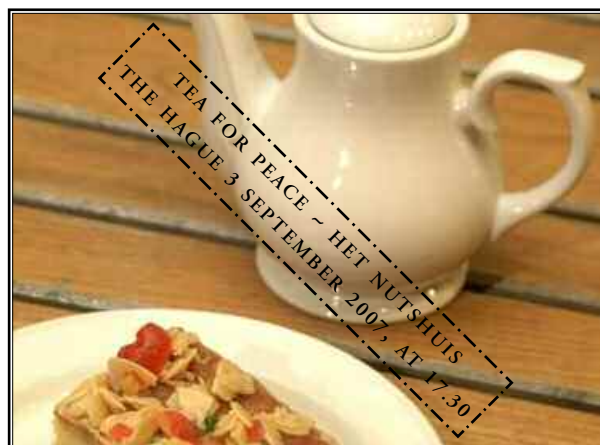
The highest Muslim authority in Egypt, Al-Azhar Supreme Council of Islamic Research, has announced that FGM should not be conducted as it is harmful and has no basis in the Islam.



# UNESCO PROMOTES SPORT VALUES AT TENNIS COMPETITION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) joined forces with Belgian female top tennis player Justine Henin to promote values in sports, such as fair play and to raise awareness to the dangers of performance-enhancing products.

During the Paris Stade Français Youth Tennis Open – BNP Paribas Cup, UNESCO promoted a series of educational workshops, interactive games and other activities for the young players, parents and coaches. Always on their side was Justine Henin, a winner of the tournament herself in 1996. The competition is for players aged between 13 and 14, giving greater value to the UNESCO programme, which focused on the promotion of values such as team spirit, honesty, and mutual respect while simultaneously addressing the issue of doping in sports. ■



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# GENDER



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